NEA Today

March 1999
Vol. 17, No. 6
Washington, D.C.

The Newspaper for Members
of the National Education Association

High-Stakes Tests

How NEA members are helping students succeed

see page 4

NEA Today

March 1999
Volume 17, Number 6

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NEA Today (ISSN 0734-7219) is published eight times a year, monthly, in September, October, November, January, February, March, April, and May by the National Education Association, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036-3290.

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to NEA Membership Records, Attn: NEA Today Address Change, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Telephone: 202/822-7207.

NEA Today is mailed to all NEA members as a benefit of membership. Nonmember subscription price: $35 domestic and $58 foreign. For members, subscriptions represent $3.45 of annual dues.

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Don't Get Mad, Get Ready!

President's Viewpoint

High-stakes tests are here to stay. Our professional duty is to help our students succeed.

Bob Chase

As educators, we're all for high academic standards. We take pride in communicating high expectations to our students. Why, then, are so many of us seething about the stampede toward high-stakes tests?

Let me count the reasons! The tests are imposed from above, typically by politicians and bureaucrats in far-off state capitals. They threaten to crimp our creativity.

They create an imperative to "teach to the test" and to dwell obsessively on facts and formulas. (I'm reminded of E.M. Forster's warning that "spoon feeding in the long run teaches nothing but the shape of a spoon.")

Perhaps most disturbingly, high-stakes tests often raise the bar too high, too fast for disadvantaged children in struggling schools—with the potential for disastrous results.

I could go on. But how productive is this naysaying and negativity? Bear in mind that, in state after state, a powerful political dynamic is driving the trend toward testing.

Citizens correctly demand high standards and accountability from their public schools and from public school employees. And, like it or not, test scores are popular with the public because they offer a quantifiable measure of school performance.

As professionals, we are keenly aware of the shortcomings of any standardized test. High-stakes tests, in particular, are a blunt instrument. But the hard reality is that these tests are here—and here to stay. We can't stick our heads in the sand.

To the contrary, we have a professional responsibility to be a constructive, positive force in shaping and implementing these tests.

This means securing a seat at the table when the statewide standards and tests are formulated. It means doing everything in our power as educators to help students succeed on the tests. And—I can't stress this too strongly—it means that our state and local NEA affiliates must be outspoken in demanding high-quality professional development to prepare teachers and other school employees for this new world.

We certainly have our work cut out for us—because setting high academic standards and achieving high academic standards are two very different things.

Unfortunately, the prevailing mindset among politicians and policy wonks is something right out of *Field of Dreams*. Their approach to high standards seems to be: "If we set them, the students will achieve."

And they are deluding themselves. It is folly to raise the bar for all students to a level that is currently being reached by only a relatively elite few, unless governments are willing to undertake a massive effort to prepare teachers and students to succeed.

Case in point: Virginia has won plaudits in the media for setting rigorous subject-by-subject "Standards of Learning." These are standards with teeth—backed up by tests given to students in grades 3, 5, and 8 and in high school. Once the tests are fully phased in, students won't be able to get a diploma unless they pass the high school exam.

The trouble is that Virginia has done next to nothing to align curricula with the Standards of Learning. Worse, the new standards and tests were dumped on teachers out of the blue, with only the most superficial preparation and professional development.

So is it any surprise that when the first test results were announced in January, a whopping 97 percent of Virginia's public schools flunked? Even in affluent Fairfax County, where students set the pace on every national exam and benchmark, only 13 of more than 200 schools passed.

How fair and valid is a test that only 3 percent of schools can pass?

Clearly, the lesson from Virginia is that we need to test the tests. Are the tests reasonable? Are they phased in appropriately? Are teachers and students given the time and resources to succeed?

> We have a professional responsibility to be a constructive, positive force in shaping and implementing these tests.

I urge you to read the cover story in this issue of *NEA Today* to learn how our colleagues in Texas and Virginia are dealing positively and creatively with standards-based instruction. In addition, if your local Association hasn't already begun an intensive dialogue on this issue, it's time to do so now.

I repeat, high standards and high-stakes tests are here to stay. They have thrust us into a brave new world. By all means, let us be brave—and affirmative—in shaping this new world in the best interests of the children we teach.

Comments? You can E-mail me directly at BobChase@nea.org.

NEA at a Glance

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Did You Know...
That NEA is partnering with more than a dozen major businesses in the United States to assemble the most comprehensive exhibition yet on the promise—and reality—of technology in education. The exhibition will open at the NEA headquarters building in Washington, D.C., and a "virtual" version will appear on the Internet. Watch *NEA Today* for details.

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NEA Today March '99

High-Stakes Tests

Joe Di Dio

Look beyond this month's cover story to find more perspectives on high-stakes tests. NEA President Bob Chase lays out an Association analysis on page 2. Hear from a leading critic of high-stakes testing on page 6 and learning theorist Howard Gardner on page 42. For a review of the best new research on the Black-white test score gap, see page 45. And, on page 43, two members debate a most testy point.

Cover photo by Joe Di Dio

4 Testing Your Patience?

It's easy to let the high-stakes testing mania get you down, but it's getting harder to ignore it. What to do? In this issue, you'll find profiles of two NEA members who are putting aside their opinions of the tests to try to help their students do well. In Virginia, Pam Heath (standing, above) and three colleagues are helping to rewrite math and English curriculum to meet new state standards. And, in Texas, Michael Urick's working to boost students' enthusiasm and motivation to do well. A look at their approaches might influence your own.

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High-Stakes

They're here, and they're not going away. Here's how two NEA members are working to help their students do well on state-mandated tests.

Pencil sharpeners in schools across the nation are getting a good workout this spring as million of students get their number twos ready for statewide standardized tests.

The stakes have never been higher. Based on test results, some children will be retained in their grade. Others won't graduate with their peers. Some teachers will see their evaluations tied to test scores. And some schools will be publicly tagged "low performing," ordered to improve scores—or else.

Are standardized tests the best tool to judge how well a student or school performs? The debate rages on, while you're left to figure out the best way to get students ready for the tests—no matter what you think.

So what do you do? Drill sample test questions until students can recite answers in their sleep? Change your lesson plans to reflect test questions? Revise the curriculum to reflect new standards?

There's no consensus. So NEA members who want their students to do well on the tests are trying different strategies. Here are just two.

What works in your school or classroom? Let us know by visiting *NEA Today* online at www.nea.org/neatoday.

IN TEXAS

Motivating Students

In the early morning hours before class begins, students at McCallum High School, north of downtown Austin, crowd into the gym for a boisterous pep rally.

But the chants, cheers, and songs aren't for the football team. The cheers are for students about to take TAAS, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills.

A pep rally may seem excessive—until you consider what's at stake.

Each spring, students in grades 3-12 take the state exam. Based on the scores, schools are rated high- or low-performing.

Students in low-performing schools are enrolled in Saturday and after-school classes. High school students who fail the state's exit exam don't graduate. And the push is on to link the scores to teacher evaluations.

"There's pressure on many campuses right now for educators to throw out the curriculum and teach to the test," says Brenda Urps, president of the Austin Association of Teachers.

It's no wonder that students at McCallum High School know their TAAS scores as well as they know their locker numbers.

Michael Urick, who teaches sophomore English at McCallum, says motivational events like pep rallies are key to helping students do well on the test.

"I echo over and over to them: 'We're gonna beat this test!'" Urick says. "I think it helps on test day when they go in prepared and optimistic. They're more willing to put in the time to see it through."

Urick invites former students who have done well on TAAS to speak to his class before test time. And he's been known to encourage kids to try a form of visualization to help them prepare.

"I may have them picture themselves leaving the testing room with a perfect essay turned in," he explains.

Not only are his students confident when they enter the exam room, they're familiar with the format of the test.

"When I assign students to write about a novel or short story, I often write my prompts in the same format as they appear on the TAAS test," Urick explains.

"Two or three times a year, the whole 10th grade writes a practice essay using an old TAAS test," he adds.

"I don't feel I'm doing anything artificial. We make sure basic skills are not left out of the curriculum. I still teach the essential elements of good persuasive writing, but I do a lot of it within the format of the test."

The result: McCallum's English department boasts a 95 percent pass rate on the writing portion of the test.

Says Urick: "I think TAAS is a pretty decent measurement of a student's performance. It just shouldn't be the *only* measurement of a student's or a school's success."

Kevin Virobik-Adams

English teacher Michael Urick helps a student prepare for a test that will determine if he'll graduate on time.

Tests

IN VIRGINIA

Rethinking Curriculum

Virginia educators are still reeling from the news that 97 percent of the state's schools posted failing grades in January on the new Standards of Learning (SOL) exam.

The test, given to students in grades 3, 5, 8, and high school, measures knowledge of the state's new academic standards.

Since the SOL tests were first administered in 1998, scores of Virginia teachers have complained of pressure from administrators to dump their curriculum and drill students in SOL test material.

Many are doing just that.

But in other areas, educators are working with administrators to find new ways to prepare students to do well.

Third grade teacher Pam Heath and three colleagues, for example, are helping the Franklin County school district rewrite the math and English curriculum to reflect new standards.

"We call it unpacking the SOLs," says Heath.

"We're identifying the specific skills a child needs in order to master the new standards," says Heath, a member of the Franklin County Education Association. "The next step is to incorporate those skills into the curriculum."

Heath says certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards helped her take a broader view of how students learn best.

"You can't just teach to the test and have students memorize a bunch of isolated facts," she says. "You have to teach for understanding so students can apply concepts to any test question."

This school year, Heath has been traveling to area schools, coaching teachers in how to rework lesson plans to meet the standards.

For example, Heath encourages elementary teachers to forget the toga parties when teaching about ancient civilization, a big part of the SOL test.

"I encourage them to think of the big picture. What's the larger idea about democracy? If students have a bigger understanding of democracy, they can think their way through the questions."

Heath also works with fourth grade teachers on reshaping their writing curriculum.

"We know students are expected to demonstrate good written expression, style, structure and organization," Heath explains.

"I may go into a classroom and work with a teacher to align writing curriculum to reflect that. I'll even walk the students through the stages of brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing a written piece."

And Heath doesn't hesitate to give students test-taking tips and strategies.

"I think it's a good idea to familiarize students with how to fill out bubble sheets," Heath says, "or how to answer multiple-choice questions.

"An eight-year-old looking at a question with four possible answers needs to understand that there's a way to eliminate the answers you know can't be right to increase the probability of choosing a correct answer."

For the reading comprehension portion of the SOL, Heath says, "I have students practice how to read a passage and go back and highlight context clues. When they go take the test, they're used to looking for those context clues while they read the passage. It helps them answer the questions correctly."

Time is of the essence for Heath and other Virginia educators. By the year 2007, schools must achieve a 70 percent pass rate on the SOL test to be accredited. High school seniors have until 2004 to pull their scores up on the test or they will be denied graduation.

Says Heath: "There's a lot of anxiety and confusion out there about SOL. But I think educators are rising to meet the challenge."

—Karen Gutloff

Joe Di Dio

Virginia elementary teachers Pam Heath (left) and Gloria Anderson aren't into filling students' heads with isolated facts.

In the Nation

Increasing numbers of states are mandating standardized tests.

- To date, 48 states—Iowa and Nebraska are excluded—administer statewide exams.
- In 19 of those states, students must pass exams to graduate from high school.
- Increasing numbers of states are pushing to tie student scores to teacher performance evaluations or pay.
- Congress scrapped plans for voluntary national testing until it can review the new National Academy of Sciences study on high stakes testing (see resource box, page 6).

States are having mixed results with test scores.

- In 1998, Texas students showed improved scores on TAAS for the fourth year in a row. The passing rate: 77 percent last year.
- Ninety-seven percent of schools in Virginia failed the new Standards of Learning exam.
- In Massachusetts, a majority of students scored in the "failing" or "needs improvement" categories of the state standards test.
- Since 1990, six states have shown improvement in both fourth and eighth grade math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

A number of states are getting flack from parents who say the tests do more harm than good.

- In Johnson County, North Carolina, and other areas, parents have filed lawsuits against school districts to protest decisions to retain kids who flunk state exams.
- Parents in a Michigan school district refused to let their kids take a new high school proficiency test, worried it would negatively affect their kids' chances of getting into college.

Source: *Education Week's Quality Counts '99: Rewarding Results, Punishing Failure* (see page 6).

Photographs by Joe Di Dio

Is High-Stakes Testing Fair?

Monty Neill is one of the nation's top critics of state-mandated, high-stakes testing. The executive director of the Center for Fair and Open Testing in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Neill explained his position recently to NEA Today*'s Karen Gutloff.*

What's your main objection to high-stakes tests?

These tests are not a good measure of a student's ability to think, reason, or problem solve in subject areas. The use of one test to determine something like high school graduation, school accreditation, or teacher evaluations is very inappropriate.

Also, there are measurement errors in these tests. For example, a score of 57 often means a 1/2 to 2/3 probability that the score is really between 50 and 64. Making decisions based on tests with that level of error is a mistake.

How else will we know how well students are doing?

You don't need to test every child. The National Assessment of Educational Progress tests a statistically significant sampling of students, then compares data on kids in more than 40 states. The point is to know how well students are doing state-to-state, not just on a school or individual level.

What's behind this push for more testing?

There are a number of different factors at play. These tests are propelled by a lot of fear that the United States will lose disastrously in international competition.

But there's a lack of real evidence that testing will make things better. And there's a justifiable concern that many schools aren't doing well. A number of schools don't have an intellectually rich curriculum for kids.

The argument is that tests will motivate students. But I think it will turn them off to school. Some will only be motivated to pass the test.

Who are the biggest losers in this high-stakes testing game?

Students are big losers. What often happens is that an ineffective test becomes the curriculum. The state says "focus on these standards," but, in reality, teachers will focus on the test. If these tests control curriculum, teachers are likely to coach students on how to beat the test. In the end, rather than improving curriculum, the test undermines the achievement of high-quality learning.

But what about areas where students are getting high test scores?

Some test scores tend to go up, but there's no evidence kids are learning more. If you gave another test, scores might be very low. You're testing one thing, but not another.

Some states, including Texas and North Carolina, emphasize improving the quality of the teaching force, reducing class size, and equalizing funding —while also giving a test. So we don't know if the improved scores should be attributed to those factors or to the test itself.

How are minority students faring on the tests?

We know that, on average, most minority students don't do as well as white students on the tests. A study by the National Science Foundation shows that in low-income areas and schools with a high ratio of minority students, teachers are more likely to teach to the test.

What do you suggest in lieu of testing?

There are multiple ways to measure student performance. The best way is to have student work collected in a portfolio, based on a period of time in the classroom. It shouldn't be a snapshot or one-time event.

How can educators make the best of the tests they face?

I'd say try not to let the test take over curriculum instruction. Doing what you know is good for students anyway is likely to prepare them for the test. For example, have students read and write a lot. It's clear the most critical part of a test is the reading. If students don't read well, they won't even do well on the math part of the test.

Is it wrong to teach kids how to take a standardized test?

No. Tests are mysterious. It's a kind of writing you seldom see anywhere else. I think it's fine to let students understand how tests are constructed. Let them analyze these tests to understand what the test makers want and to learn what the questions mean.

Are we going to see more tests in the future?

We could see fewer when people see testing is not producing large gains and is crowding everything else out of the schools.

(Contact Neill at 617/864-4810.)

NEA Helps Affiliates Cope

NEA's Center for Teaching and Learning works with state and local affiliates—who are fighting their way through the maze of high-stakes testing—in the following ways:

■ **Providing information:** The Center distributes to affiliates a series of booklets on assessment and testing. The booklets give local Associations advice on the best ways to assess student knowledge and fit standardized tests into their assessment programs. Materials are in the works on standards and student testing. For copies, contact your local Association.

■ **Doing the research:** NEA monitors national and international developments in the assessment of student achievement in order to provide advice to affiliates.

■ **Analyzing legislation and policy:** NEA works with state affiliates to interpret new legislation and policies mandating standardized testing, then shares the experiences of one state or district with others in the same boat. For information on how NEA can help your affiliate deal with high-stakes tests, contact Glen Cutlip at 202/822-7369.

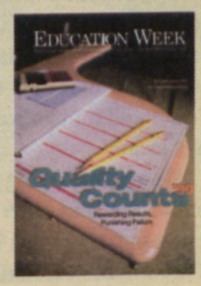
■ **Launching a clearinghouse:** NEA is interested in hearing about the issues you're facing in the classroom as a result of high-stakes tests. How are you dealing with parent communications, for example, or the need to align instruction with assessment? Send details to GCutlip@nea.org.

Resources

■ *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation*, a National Academy of Sciences report to Congress, details appropriate methods and practices to consider when imposing high stakes tests. $39.95 plus $4.50 s&h. Contact National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W., Box 285, Washington, DC 20055, 800/624-6242. On the Web: www.nap.edu. Those who order a copy on the Web will get a 20 percent discount.

■ *Children at the Center: A Workshop Approach to Standardized Test Preparation, K-8* offers educators pragmatic advice on preparing kids for standardized tests. $17. Contact Heinemann Press, 361 Hanover St., Portsmouth, NH 03801, 603/431-7840. Fax: 603/431-7840. On the Web: www.heinemann.com

■ *Quality Counts '99: Rewarding Results, Punishing Failure* details the findings of an exhaustive 50-state survey of state policies on accountability and testing. Published by *Education Week*. $10. Bulk rate discounts available. Contact *Education Week*, 6935 Arlington Rd., Suite 100, Bethesda, MD 20814, 301/280-3100. On the Web: www.edweek.org.



■ *Put to the Test: An Educator's and Consumer's Guide to Standardized Testing*, written by researcher Gerald Bracey, is reviewed on page 45. $14.95 plus $3 s&h. Contact Phi Delta Kappa International at 800/766-1156.

■ *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, a collection of research findings, is also reviewed on page 45. Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, eds. $18.95. Contact the Brookings Institution Press, 800/275-1447, check bookstores, or order from www.amazon.com.

Across the Nation

Seuss Will Surely Be Smiling!

'Shaq in the Hat' joins NEA members in a massive reading celebration March 2.

With a *Parade* magazine story, a *Los Angeles Times* writing contest, and a public service announcement by basketball superstar Shaquille O'Neal, this year's March 2 Read Across America celebration is generating a lot of national attention.

Still the heart of the Dr. Seuss birthday bash remains at the local level, with the incredible creativity of NEA members and friends. Here's a look at what they've cooked up.

Early Bird Gets the Worm

■ "I've already confirmed that the governor, mayor, professional athletes, and local TV news anchors will read with my children on March 2."
—Gary Brown, Federal Way, Washington, on October 20, 1998

■ "I'll eat worms to reward my students for reading 10,000 books."
—Earl Wiman, principal, Jackson, Tennessee

■ "I'll provide the ketchup to go with the worms."
—Dean Barry, parent, Jackson, Tennessee

Let the Contests Begin

■ "If students read for 1,000 hours outside of school in February, Mr. Brewer (our principal/superintendent) will act out *Green Eggs and Ham*. He'll sit in a box in a tree. If students read for 1,500 hours, he'll be in a box, in a tree, in a boat, with a goat."
—Gloria Chesbro, Sutter, California

■ "We're challenging students to read 5,000 books between February 2 and March 2. If they do, we'll celebrate with an all-school read and feed."
—Carol Shaw, Omaha, Nebraska

■ "I'll sit in Jello if my students have read 10,000 hours by March 2."
—Helen Brown, Buhl, Idaho

We Play

■ "We'll have a pajama party for 60,000 people over our TCI cable TV channel. People will get in their pajamas, and we'll read away."
—Linda Garrett, Montgomery, Alabama

■ "As many staffers as possible will be wearing "The Hat Everyone Wants."
—Lois Lasker, Lexington, Ohio

Russell Baer

Basketball superstar Shaquille O'Neal and these Los Angeles students star in a TV public service announcement urging involvement in Read Across America.

And We Care

■ "My students will be collecting money during the week to buy books for newborns."
—Lou Walls, Queen City, Texas

■ "My third graders plan to invade the senior citizens homes across the street from our school, armed with Seussian good cheer."
—Gloria Morissetee, Fall River, Massachusetts

■ "The ESP unit here has arranged for every state legislator to be reading with a student in the State Capitol."
—Janet McIntire, Salem, Oregon

■ "We are a 10-student country school and last year had green eggs and ham for lunch, and it looks like, well, we've started a new tradition."
—Karen Nabb, Fremont, Nebraska

■ "I work at a psychiatric hospital and plan to read to my high school class. I'm brainstorming to come up with other ideas to make the day fun."
—Deborah Lloyd, Rochester, Minnesota

Global Reach

■ "Our school staff will host an evening of reading. We'll invite the camp commanders as well as citizens from our surrounding Japanese community. Last year, we had an overwhelming response, and we plan to top it this year."
—Dawna Armstrong, Japan

■ "My infant son can't read, but he loves the sounds of the great Dr. Seuss. I realize that this is Read Across America, but Grandma wants her grandson to have all the experiences of home. We'll just start reading a few hours ahead of you all."
—Jennifer Forth, Australia

Great Partners

■ "Since last year, each of our students has been able to earn a Cat-in-the-Hat hat by reading 25 days out of the month. So far, 600 students have earned their hats—only 95 more to go. We'll celebrate Dr. Seuss's birthday by letting students take the hats home—after the local newspaper takes a group photo."
—Laura Rytting, Aspen Elementary PTA, Orem, Utah

■ "We'll celebrate the anniversary of a tutorial program born during last year's Read Across America."
—Priscilla Burwell, Wharton Memorial Baptist Church, Nelson, Virginia

■ For a list of the two dozen leading national youth and literacy groups partnering with NEA to support Read Across America, go to www.nea.org/readacross/partners.html.

What It's All About

■ "We'll light a birthday candle that sparkles in memory of the great Doctor Seuss!"
—Barbara Rhodes, Northeast Texas Library System, Garland, Texas

Pledge Now

It's not too late. Let NEA know how you are going to participate at www.nea.org/readacross/pledge.html. Pledging this year is the best way to make sure you get early information about plans for next year's celebration.

Heroes & Zeroes

In life-threatening crises hundreds of miles apart, two NEA members knew just what to do. Wisconsin teacher Tom Wilcox (left) performed the Heimlich maneuver on a child choking on his lunch. And Ohio teacher Joe Hayberger rescued a boy who was perilously close to drowning at a local swimming pool. Two amazing teachers, two grateful kids, lots more birthdays.

WEAC

No chip has much nutritional value, but Tostitos gets a failing grade for social values, too. A recent TV commercial shows teachers munching away in the faculty lounge, singing "Don't know much about history," while hundreds of students run amok in the halls. Tasteless ad, tasteless chip.

It seems a Cat in the Hat is worth money in the bank—or something like that. For the second year in a row, MBNA America Bank, N.A, has given generously to support Read Across America. The money will help NEA distribute more posters to NEA members and "Shaq-in-the-Hat" public service announcements (left) to the media.

It's unusual to hear about banks giving away money, but, hey, they count it all day long. Not true for Regina Jennings, a retired custodian whose salary never topped $10,000 a year. And yet Jennings recently donated $93,000 to her former employer, the West Virginia University College of Law. "They always talked to me and asked me how I was doing," she explains.

The Dominion Post

Okay, so columnist George Will can write. But what is he thinking? In a column last fall promoting vouchers, Will wrote: "It takes a village of vigilant liberals to keep poor children chained on the plantation of public education." It just takes your breath away, doesn't it?

Across the Nation

A Raw Deal for Rural Schools

Almost half of NEA members work in rural schools. Theirs is a story of problems—and promise.

A visitor to Oregon's rural Clatskanie 6J district might, at first glance, wonder why so many educators have stayed so long.

In the woods 60 miles northwest of Portland, they have few chances to interact with colleagues, and recent funding cuts have reduced the local teaching force by 25 percent.

There's been no money for technology, and no chance to introduce students to today's high-tech workplace. Only a year ago, the students of Clatskanie High business teacher Elsa Wooley were still using typewriters, a fact she finds "embarrassing."

Press this NEA member for more bad news, and you'll hear about the roof leak over the high school auditorium, the scarcity of subs, and the trauma of two nearby towns that lost their schools to consolidation.

But ask Wooley what has kept her in Clatskanie for 30 years, and she'll boast about a "nurturing" place, with fewer limits on the subjects you can teach and learn, and residents who "will back and connect with teachers."

"Here, families are more intact, and kids' values are stronger," Wooley says. "Students work with you and aren't fighting the system. I feel part of their families—when I see them downtown, I know everybody's names."

Now Wooley has an opportunity to tell a national audience about the joys and problems of rural schools. She's one of five teachers who sit on NEA's Special Committee on Rural Education.

Roger Werth

In Clatskanie, Oregon—population 1,900—most of Elsa Wooley's students have parents who work in the woods or at the paper mill. She's been teaching there 30 years.

The panel, chaired by South Dakota Education Association President Elaine Roberts, is charged with assessing the status of rural education, identifying the needs of rural students and school employees, and making recommendations to the NEA Board of Directors this spring.

The committee report will be important reading, even for urbanites.

A sneak preview of the findings:

■ **Almost half—49 percent—of NEA teacher members work in rural areas or small towns.** "While rural and small towns have 49 percent of the nation's public schools, 41 percent of its teachers, and 38 percent of its students," reports NEA researcher Tim Tang, "they receive only 22 percent of federal, state, and local K-12 funding."

"This disparity calls out for more federal support for public education—the only way to equalize spending," says retired NEA staffer Dale Lestina, president of Organizations Concerned About Rural Education.

Lestina says rural educators need to "generate letters on rural school needs to members of Congress" before the upcoming debate on reauthorization—expansion and improvement—of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

■ **There must be more training opportunities for rural educators—and better ways to recruit and retain new teachers.** Says NEA rural committee member John Wright of Arizona: "We need to institutionalize the relationship between universities and rural schools. Qualified teachers in rural schools should have the chance to become adjunct college professors.

"We also need to work with the NEA Student Program to create awareness that student teachers can go to rural districts and establish a deep relationship with the community."

■ **The nation needs to know what's *right* about rural schools.** While addressing problems, the committee report will also stress *promise*.

"Start with personal safety, community ties, and smaller class sizes," says committee chair Elaine Roberts, "and don't forget lower dropout rates, a higher likelihood of rural teachers remaining in the profession, and higher average student achievement scores."

For More Information

Send an E-mail message to Elsa Wooley at wooley@clatskanie.com or read an NEA Research report on the status of rural education at www.nea.org/publiced/rural.html.

Rural Ed's Best Resource
Don't think for a minute that NEA rural members throw in the towel because of scarce resources.

"Rural teachers are creative," says Elsa Wooley, a business teacher in Clatskanie, Oregon. "We don't have a lot, but what we do have, we use well—and the community helps us every way it can."

Faced with a technology vacuum, Clatskanie High School students and staffers raised money for computers, got local businesses to donate machines, and managed to set up two labs with a total of 32 terminals. Staffers donated time over the summer to get everything up and running.

Closing the Techno-Gap
According to the U.S. Department of Education, great progress has been made in connecting the nation's public schools to the Internet—particularly in rural schools and small towns.

In 1997, 79 percent of rural schools and 84 percent of small town schools were plugged into the Net, compared with 74 percent of urban schools and 78 percent of suburban schools.

The dramatic increase in rural access can be attributed to the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which provides $1.3 billion in discounts on telecom services sold to schools. Half of that amount may go to rural and other high-cost areas.

Less Is More?
Compared to their urban and suburban peers, rural teachers have lower salaries. They're also less likely to have health, dental, or life insurance, to travel in the summer, take college education courses, or even enjoy a duty-free lunch.

Yet NEA survey data show that 67 percent of NEA rural teacher members would become teachers if they could go back to their college days and start over again. That compares to 56 percent of urban teacher members and 63 percent of suburban teacher members.

The Bottom Line

New teachers: One of every five teachers in America's schools this past fall was either new to the profession or new to the school, reports Market Data Retrieval. Overall, 2 million new teachers will need to be hired over the next decade.

Class size: The U.S. Department of Education has begun distributing the $1.2 billion in aid dollars now available to help create smaller classes. The Department has summarized the case for smaller classes at a new Web site, www.ed.gov/pubs/ReducingClass.

More class size: New test results from California, the state that made smaller classes a top priority three years ago, are showing statistically significant achievement gains among second and third grade kids in classes with 20 or fewer students.

Vocational ed: The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards will offer its first national certification in voc ed by year's end. The categories: communications, business, manufacturing, technology education, and consumer, health, and human services.

On Your Side

Time To Clear the Air

NEA and EPA team up to help educators fight for cleaner indoor air—and for children's health.

Here are a few facts and figures that might make you hesitate before allowing a child to breathe inside a school building:

■ The typical public school contains four times as many occupants per square foot as an office building. And the air inside that school, say U.S. Environmental Protection Agency researchers, may be two to five times—and occasionally 100 times—more polluted than outdoor air.

■ Because their bodies and lungs are still developing, children are "breathing a greater volume of air per minute than adults, meaning they're exposed to more pollution," says EPA environmental scientist Tracey Mitchell.

■ An estimated 1 in 13 school-age kids now has asthma, which can be triggered by indoor irritants like molds, colds, or viruses.

For the EPA's Mitchell, a respiratory therapist with 10 years of pediatric experience, the battle against indoor air pollution is a fight for children's health.

Fortunately, she isn't fighting alone, thanks to a cooperative partnership between the EPA Indoor Environments Division and NEA's Health Information Network (HIN).

Since 1995, EPA specialists like Mitchell have teamed up with NEA HIN staff to train 110 Association activists on school indoor air quality issues like asthma management, ventilation basics, and radon testing.

The trainees are encouraged to become clean air organizers in their districts and use EPA's *Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Action Kit*. The kit includes a coordinator's guide, a problem-solving wheel, and preventive checklists for everyone from teachers to maintenance crews.

The training has paid immediate dividends.

The very day Arizona trainee Mark Cavendish returned to Amphitheater High School in Tucson, he discovered a contractor dry sanding the gym floor.

"They made no arrangement to cover ducts or air units or to seal the doors," he recalls. "I walked in there and could hardly see!"

When challenged by Cavendish—a custodian and ESP vice president of the 510-member Amphitheater Education Association—the contractor claimed the cloud would "dissipate."

Cavendish knew better, and his bosses *knew* that he knew.

"The contractor balked," the union officer says, "but the administration backed us up and sealed the vents.

"Indoor air quality became more of a concern to the district after this," Cavendish notes. In fact, the district safety committee worked many of the NEA HIN workshop materials into its own health and safety program.

In his job as a custodian, Cavendish has helped make some healthy changes.

To prevent mold from growing in carpets and pads, Amphitheater High School now uses a chemical shampoo instead of gallons of water. And vacuum cleaners now have beater bars to pull more dirt out of the carpet fibers.

Cavendish says he never paid much attention to indoor air quality until he was trained in 1996. But now he conducts indoor air quality workshops at health fairs and keeps a sharp eye for "pictures or plants placed on vents" when making his rounds.

"There's a lot you can do to stop indoor air pollution—easy solutions like unblocking vents, changing filters, and using vacuum cleaners with more suction—but you *first* need to heighten air quality awareness in your school," Cavendish says, "and educate the people in charge of maintenance."

John Miller

Arizona custodian Mark Cavendish has found a lot of easy, low-cost ways to improve indoor air quality at his school.

For More Information

If you make a commitment to try out Environmental Protection Agency's easy-to-use ***Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Action Kit*** *in your school or district, you can receive one free for a limited time only.*

To order a kit, contact Christine Luong at the NEA Health Information Network, 202/822-7799. Send E-mail to Cluong@nea.org. Or leave a detailed message, including your daytime phone, on the NEA HIN hotline, 800/718-8387.

For more on indoor air pollution, visit the NEA-HIN Indoor Air Quality Web page at www.nea.org/hin/air.

Cleaner Air—Step By Step

What do you do if your administrators ignore indoor air pollution or are skittish about its clean-up costs?

"Start small, very grassroots," advises NEA Health Information Network staffer Christine Luong. "Raise the awareness of parents, teachers, support employees, and others first."

"Set up a basic wellness education program, with indoor air quality as a piece," adds Naomi Baden, a UniServ director for the Montgomery County Education Association in Maryland.

Baden, an NEA HIN training instructor, suggests these escalating steps to clean up indoor air:

■ **Keep track of repeated indoor air quality complaints**—including allergies, headaches, chest tightness, drowsiness, and fatigue.

■ **Use the *Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Action Kit.*** It's a good way to educate administrators, teachers, and support employees on small preventive measures that can save big bucks in the long run.

■ **Strengthen communication between teachers and support staff.** Teachers need to know about custodial/maintenance staffing levels, resources, or priorities when requesting preventive maintenance. "There must be a strong teacher-ESP relationship at the district level," says Baden.

■ **Work, where possible, with site administrators.** "Principals have to breathe, too!" Baden points out.

■ **Don't press for cleaner indoor air by yourself.** "You need an Association identity and a rep structure in your building to take this issue on in an organized way," Baden stresses.

■ **Seek parent allies.** "When it comes to substantial indoor air problems in our school system," Baden notes, "it's the organized parent voice, either that of the PTA or affected parents, that will push administrators over the edge to make improvements.

"Indoor air quality," Baden concludes, "can be a dynamite issue for building a parent-teacher alliance in your community."

New Americans: The number of immigrants in the United States has nearly tripled since 1970, according to census data collected last March. Immigrants now make up 10 percent of the nation's population, with half of all new immigrants Spanish-speaking.

College enrollment: About 1.1 million Hispanic students are now attending America's colleges and universities. But the percentage of Hispanic young people in college has not significantly increased since 1980. For more, check the Web at http://nces.ed.gov.

Education levels: Parents of Black teens are far more likely to have a high school diploma today than a quarter-century ago. In 1972, about one in three parents of Black 15- to 18-year-olds had a high school diploma. The 1997 figure: four of every five.

Global comparisons: A quarter of Americans 25-34 years old, both male and female, have completed a college degree. In Japan, 34 percent of young men, but only 12 percent of young women, have reached that milestone.

In the States

Mentoring on Mentoring

In her North Carolina Teacher Academy workshop on mentoring skills, trainer Shirley Harris offers these tips for working with new teachers:

- Be a resource and a good listener.
- Remember that you're there to "support, guide, and help steer" the novice with whom you're working.
- "Plant the seed," nurture the new teacher, and establish trust.
- Offer different strategies for different situations and encourage the novice to discover undeveloped potential.
- Help the new teacher create a professional development plan.
- Understand the level of development of individual teachers, which is often uneven. "You'll sometimes find a newcomer who could be a 20-year teacher," Harris notes. "Some people are naturals."

Counting Little Heads

Researchers for the Wisconsin Education Association Council have completed a detailed study of class sizes across the Badger State.

At the end of the 1997-98 school year, the typical Wisconsin teacher met with five classes each day, had classes consisting of 23 students, and graded about 110 students.

Helpful data indeed when you lobby for better staffing and infrastructure. That's why the Florida Teaching Profession-NEA conducted a statewide class size survey in early February.

FTP-NEA borrowed expertise from the Arizona Education Association, which conducted a highly accurate day-long class size count in 1997.

Overwhelming Workload?

At the request of a member, leaders of Education Minnesota have formed a task force on special education teacher overload.

"Besides facing very stressful day-to-day work situations," reports EM staffer Tom Nordby, "these teachers are becoming overwhelmed by paperwork, both from federal requirements and new state reporting mandates." Stay tuned.

Of, By, and For Teachers

Harold Hinson

NEA member Shirley Harris doubles as a language arts teacher and trainer of new teachers at North Carolina's Teacher Academy, a powerhouse of peer instruction.

Ask a *teacher* what kind of professional development is best. That's what they do in North Carolina.

If you were in charge of teacher training in your state, what would you set up?

How about a small agency with adequate funds, not much bureaucracy, run primarily by educators, with summer classes taught by experienced teachers right out of the trenches?

Stop dreaming—and move to North Carolina. That's where you'll find the Teacher Academy, a state agency that has provided peer instruction to more than 13,300 teachers and principals since 1994.

Brought to life through the vision and lobbying of the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE), the Teacher Academy reflects teacher priorities—including residential summer sessions on college campuses, training by veteran classroom teachers, and lots of hands-on instruction.

That's no accident. Classroom teachers comprise the majority of the Academy's Board of Trustees.

Academy Director Julia Kron—herself a former high school science teacher and NCAE president—administers a $4.1 million budget with a supporting staff of just five people at her headquarters office.

The lion's share of the money goes *directly* to educators in the field, for everything from $500 stipends for summer session participants to salaries for the more than 275 certified trainers who teach them.

Teacher control helps the Academy:

- **Keep improving.** "Quality assurance is an important part of the program," says Academy board chair Joyce Elliott, now NCAE president.

"Academy trainers—practicing teachers who return to the classrooms at the end of the summer—were trained initially by the very best people we could find," Elliott stresses.

"Unlike most of the people delivering professional development in our state, our trainers are constantly in training."

Whether the subject's curriculum integration, educational technology, or mentoring skills, "we're exposed to nationally renowned experts," boasts trainer Shirley Harris, an NEA member who teaches language arts at West Montgomery Middle School. "We're on top of the research, very current."

- **Provide hard-working, well-prepared instructors.** Schooled by the experts and immersed in adult learning theory, Teacher Academy trainers know they're good. Still, they leave absolutely *nothing* to chance.

"Seven days a week for two weeks last summer," recalls Harris, "my team of trainers rewrote the modules on Creating a Professional Workplace and Implementing Systemic Change. We were committed to making this work."

During summer sessions, Harris often plans lessons until 2 a.m., then gets up early to eat breakfast with participants.

"We teach the workshops in teams of two," Harris notes. "That means there's always another set of eyes and ears, someone else to read and watch the participants. Teachers can be a tough audience!"

- **Treat teachers with respect.** In evaluations of Teacher Academy workshops, participants rave about the "professional" treatment they receive from trainers.

Small wonder. "Teachers have the highest respect for trainers who show them, rather then tell them, how to do their jobs better," points out NCAE's Joyce Elliott. "It takes someone who works in a classroom to do that."

- **Send educators home inspired and refreshed.** Teacher Academy participants, many from isolated, rural districts, get to mingle with colleagues from across the state—in groups purposely mixed by Academy planners.

"People make new friends and professional contacts," says Harris. "The networking is just amazing."

The result: a rejuvenated, well-trained teaching force equipped with dozens of new strategies to meet classroom challenges.

Tax dollars well spent? You decide.

For More Information

Visit the North Carolina Teacher Academy Web site at www.ga.unc.edu/NCTA/ or call 800/801-7983.

The Bottom Line

Advanced placement: Back in 1984, just 50 of every 1,000 high school seniors took one or more Advanced Placement exams. In 1996, the most recent year with full data, 131 of every 1,000 seniors took an AP test.

Income and education: About half the nation's graduating seniors from low-income families enroll in higher education the next year. Within the highest-income 20 percent of families, nearly four of five students who graduate attend college the next year.

College costs: Between 1986 and 1996, reports the National Center for Educational Statistics, the cost of a college education at a public college or university increased from 27 to 33 percent of the income of the average poor American family.

Test choices: Thirteen statewide exams use only multiple-choice questions to assess student competence in core subjects, reports *Quality Counts '99*, the new annual report from *Education Week*. For more, check the Web at www.edweek.org.

At the Local Level

Public Funds, Public Standards

Oregon educators ask the courts: Can public money fund a school accountable to no one?

The fast-growing Bend-LaPine school system never seems to have cash for the stuff that counts. The 12,000-student district in central Oregon cut certified librarians and elementary music instruction. Administrators say they can't do anything to lower class sizes or increase pay.

And, to rub salt in the wounds, Mountain View High English teacher Dave Fiore can't even buy full sets of novels for his literature classes.

But *somehow* the school board finds $168,000 each year to pay the bulk of the costs associated with running the Bend Community School, a private school with little, if any, enrollment access for most district students.

This private school offers an independent study program for 38 students, overseen by a teacher with an out-of-state license. According to *Smart Money* magazine, the school's been plagued by squabbling parents, lax discipline, high staff turnover, and a cockamamie curriculum.

The Bend Community School received its first public check back in 1995, after the local school board voted unanimously to ignore opposition to the funding from both school district administrators and the 665-member Bend Education Association.

Fed up, teacher Dave Fiore joined with retired Bend teachers Vernon Frost and Frank Ellis to challenge the funding in court.

Their suit charged that public funding of a private school violates the Oregon constitution, state education law, and even district policy.

With legal backing from the Oregon Education Association, the three teachers—all former local Association presidents—persisted and prevailed.

The Oregon Court of Appeals held this past fall that the district did indeed violate law and policy by failing to determine students' "educational needs and interests" before approving their placement in the private school.

Dean Guernsey

NEA activist Dave Fiore objects to a school board that finds the money to help fund a private school but won't buy full sets of novels for his literature classes. With help from the Oregon Education Association, Fiore takes his case to court—and wins.

During the long battle over the controversial Bend Community School, some boosters for the private facility have dubbed it a "charter school." They define charters as schools funded with public money that operate outside the public school system.

That's not how Fiore wants to see "charter school" defined.

"I'm not opposed to charter schools," he stresses, "but they should be under the umbrella of the public school system, use licensed teachers, and create pilot programs that can be replicated elsewhere."

Oregon is one of only 16 states with no formal charter school law now on the books. Should one pass anytime soon, Fiore wants it to deny public funds to facilities like the Bend Community School and, instead, establish standards of accountability and quality consistent with NEA policy.

Among other things, the NEA policy on charter schools calls for:

- A voice for affected public school employees in charter school design, implementation, and governance.
- Adequate safeguards for everything from employee contract rights and equal opportunity to licensed staffing and financial responsibility.
- Adequate funding that "does not divert current funds from the regular public school programs."
- Appropriate procedures for regular assessment, evaluation, and attendance record-keeping.

Meanwhile, back in the Bend area, Dave Fiore and his colleagues are still pursuing legal action that attempts to make school board members liable for misappropriating public funds. The local newspaper has dubbed their lawsuit "nasty" and "vindictive."

But ask Dave Fiore why he signed on, and you'll get a different story.

"I did what I had to do as a taxpayer and a part of the school system," he concludes. "If there are no longer public schools, we no longer have a democracy."

Speaking of democracy, Bend Education Association members are currently working hard to elect a pro-public education school board.

"We think it's time for a change and a new direction," says Bend Education Association President Kathy Housely.

For More Information

Fax the Bend Education Association at 541/389-0402.

On a Roll In Atlantic City
Last autumn, the 750-member Atlantic City Education Association stopped the school board's effort to privatize custodial services, saving 39 jobs. Better yet, the local convinced the board to hire eight new custodians and promote two insiders to lead maintenance slots.

Most convincing: a vigorous anti-privatization campaign that included fliers, radio ads, letters to the editor, and demonstrations—involving ESP, teachers, parents, and residents.

Pure Gold From Alaska
In Anchorage, a December fire at Russian Jack Elementary destroyed staff members' personal property—like computers—that made classrooms more inviting places to learn.

Anchorage Education Association members immediately set up a storefront at Northway Mall to collect donations of classroom materials to replace the lost gold. Within a few days, plastic tubs were overflowing.

When schools opened in January, retired AEA members staffed the dropoff center. Although a tragedy, this fire "highlighted the Association's strength," says local President Rich Kronberg, "its members."

Harvest Time in Nebraska
In its second annual Harvest of Books campaign, the Lincoln (Nebraska) Education Association collected 8,062 for area first graders.

The campaign enables the public to buy children's books at 40 percent discounts at local bookstores—for donation to schools—or just write a check for the purchase of books.

The program, co-sponsored by the Lincoln *Journal-Star,* relies on LEA members who volunteer to sort, count, and box the donated books.

Welcome to the Family!
In New Mexico, the 169 privately-employed bus drivers and attendants who transport Las Cruces public school students have voted for union representation. The voice of choice: the Classified School Employees Council-Las Cruces, an affiliate of both NEA and the AFT.

Budgets: Pennsylvania spends $5,458 to send a student to Penn State and nearly $23,000 "to keep a prisoner in the state pen," says a new analysis on the gap between low- and higher-income students from the Education Trust. For details, see www.edtrust.org.

Drugs: The number of students abusing drugs is dropping in several key age groups, says a new University of Michigan study, *Monitoring the Future.* In 1998, 35 percent of tenth graders used drugs, a three-point drop from 1997. For more: www.isr.umich.edu.

Alcohol: Teens who watch lots of TV are more likely to start drinking than kids who spend hours on computer or video games, says a Stanford University study reported in the journal *Pediatrics.* Students who watch music videos seem to be most likely to start drinking.

Best books: The nation's librarians and booksellers, in separate surveys, have named the same novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird,* the century's best. Other titles on the top 10 list of both groups: *The Catcher in the Rye, Lord of the Rings,* and *Beloved.*

WHY SHOULD STUDENTS BE THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN MAKE THE HONOR ROLL?

Disney's American Teacher Awards honor educators who find creative ways to inspire the joy of learning in their students. If there's a teacher you would like to nominate, call toll-free 1-877-ATA-TEACH or log on at www.disney.com.

Disney's
AMERICAN TEACHER AWARDS

Honoring creativity in teaching

Nomination deadline is March 31, 1999. Applications mailed to teachers March 31. Application deadline is May 31, 1999.
Disney's American Teacher Awards will air November 20, 1999, on *DISNEY CHANNEL*.

© Disney

A. J. Wolfe

New teachers like Carla Ebmeyer and Kirk Shadle (right) have a better chance of staying afloat in the profession, thanks to veteran teacher Nick Nicholson (left) and a strong peer assistance program in Bridgeport, Connecticut. *See page 23 for details.*

Innovators

Courting **Equity**

Innovator:
Diane Madsen

Job:
Chemistry teacher, East Kentwood High School, Kentwood, Michigan

Bright Idea:
At a girls' basketball game six years ago, Madsen's youngest daughter observed that the team didn't have cheerleaders, a mascot, a concession stand, or a program like the boys' teams.

So the girl said, "I'm going to have to be good enough to play on the boys' team." That's when her mother mobilized to even the playing field for boys and girls.

Madsen's research showed that Michigan boys had prime-time practice and game slots, fanfare at games, and longer seasons that paralleled college season sports. Girls, on the other hand, had to play major sports in non-traditional seasons.

This violated Title IX, the federal law that requires gender equity in educational programs receiving federal funds, says Madsen.

"When college recruiters were drafting volleyball players, our girls were not even on the courts, because they play after the recruiting season," says Madsen. "Girls didn't have the same opportunities for college scholarships or ranking among top-rated teams in the country."

Madsen raised her concerns with the school district superintendent, who formed a gender equity committee (later replaced with a Title IX officer) that began addressing some of the disparities—building a girls' varsity locker room at Northview High, for one.

Madsen and parent Connie Engel then formed Communities for Equity, a nonprofit organization that advocates gender equity in Michigan school athletics. Now in its fourth year, the organization offers counsel to other states struggling with equity issues.

Jennifer Giesey

Last summer, Communities for Equity filed a lawsuit against the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA), which coordinates high school sports in the state, charging that discriminatory policies require girls to play sports in non-traditional seasons with shorter schedules and at second-rate sites.

"We don't let boys get the best textbooks, the best seats, and teach them at the most accommodating times," says Madsen. "This inequity in sports hurts girls' self-esteem."

Impact:
The lawsuit against MHSAA will likely have national implications.

For More:
Contact Madsen at Communities for Equity, P.O. Box 663, Ada, MI 49301, 616/361-0526, E-mail: Wsouthw874@aol.com.

First **Physics**

Ninth graders traditionally study biology, then move to chemistry in the tenth grade and perhaps physics after that.

But some scientists and educators argue that because of advances in science over the past decades, physics should now be the science course for high school freshmen.

Nobel Prize-winning physicist Leon Lederman, a leading advocate for freshman physics, told The New York Times *in January:*

"We're proposing a kind of conceptual physics that is not so mathematical, using just the algebra ninth graders know.

You can teach Newtonian motion, the conservation of energy, and give a feeling for what an atom is, so they can walk into chemistry the next year with grace and confidence. Having those concepts first seems to be especially helpful for girls and minorities.

I'm sure it's a winning battle, but like truth and justice, it's going to take some time."

Marking the **Media**

Who:
Elana Rosen

Job:
Co-founder/executive director, Just Think Foundation

Bright Idea:
"How do we cope with the reality of a society that is media saturated?" asks Rosen. "About 90 percent of television is dreck and 10 percent is fabulous. What will stop this new media—computers, CD-roms, the Internet—from being the same?"

After years of experience producing public television documentaries, Rosen began generating answers to her own questions, creating the Just Think Foundation in 1995. The Foundation provides staff development and student workshops in media literacy—the critical thinking skills to evaluate television advertising, programming, and Web sites.

"Do you know you can make or break a company, depending on whether or not you buy their product?" Rosen asks one class.

"Most kids haven't thought about that, but they are nearly all wearing clothes with some brand-name identification," says Rosen. "We ask them questions so they can ask themselves questions."

Then, even if the kids buy something based on a commercial, they'll know that's why they are doing it.

Student projects include deconstructing a current TV commercial: Why do you like the ad? What are the advertisers trying to communicate—and are they successful? Then the students create their own documentaries, Web sites, public service announcements, or commercials.

In one project, 30 students in East Palo Alto, California researched the misrepresentation of African-American youth. They reported their findings on the Web, complete with a "racial issues IQ quiz" and a professionally produced original rap song —"Now's the time for me to rise, I might just take you by surprise."

Impact:
The Just Think Foundation has student programs in 16 California schools, plus after-school projects throughout the state. It's working to expand nationwide in 1999.

For More:
Contact the Just Think Foundation at 415/289-0122, send E-mail to think@justthink.org, or visit the Web at www.justthink.org.

David Bacon

Mannie Garcia

Speaking **Swahili**

Should U.S. high school students study Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, even Swahili? Definitely, says Richard Brecht, director of the National Council of Organizations of Less Commonly Taught Languages and professor of Russian at the University of Maryland. In our global economy, he says, there's a growing need to communicate in these languages.

How should our approach to foreign languages change?

We need to put the responsibility for learning languages at the K-12 level. We reserve serious study for college, and that's too late. In fact, only 30 percent of students are exposed to foreign language study in school.

The problem is we're in this back-to-basics mentality, placing such a high priority on math, science, and English. The traditional American myopia is all around us. We need to realize that languages are equally important.

After all, in the U.S., Spanish is our second language. If we teach it, or perhaps French, in the K-8 years, students can continue their studies—or go on to others such as Chinese or Arabic—in high school.

What advantages will students reap?

With a much richer choice of languages, students can see the broad range of cultures in the world.

There's also great earning potential for those who know more than the traditional languages. Accounting and architecture are highly globalized, telemedicine is growing, and software firms can't find enough translators.

Chinese will be a dominant language in the 21st century. Also important will be Japanese, Korean, Thai, Indonesian, and Russian.

Surveys show 80 percent of Americans think that knowing another language is important for doing business. Parents are in the real world and know this. They're supportive of immersion programs and other creative approaches. The educational system is the last place reality penetrates.

Where are we going to find more language teachers?

There's already a shortage. To expand language teaching, you have to invest in recruiting and training more teachers. A great natural resource to draw on is our heritage communities. Many of these people are highly educated, but not necessarily in language teaching.

How can technology help?

To get these languages into the schools, we have to get more efficient. If three students in a school want to learn Japanese, you can't hire a teacher just for them. We need to drop the cost, and technology will enable us to do this.

There are fabulous computer resources for teaching languages. We're working on a system, called LangNet, to share resources across all languages, especially those less commonly taught.

E-mail Brecht at rbrecht@nflc.org. For more on foreign language teaching, visit the Web at www.nflc.org or contact the National Foreign Language Center at the Johns Hopkins University, 1619 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20036, 202/667-8100.

Cultural **Immersion**

Innovator:
Lynda Wiest

Job:
Assistant professor, department of curriculum and instruction, University of Nevada, Reno

Bright Idea:
Wiest makes her preservice teachers—predominantly white college students—immerse themselves in a different culture for one hour, then discuss and write about the experience.

"I want to help them gain more sensitivity toward minority students, and to understand how being a cultural minority affects a student's ability to function in a classroom," says Wiest.

She instructs her students to observe their own feelings during their brief experience. What did they notice about the other culture? How did they think they were being perceived?

Later, Wiest asks: What did they learn that will help them as teachers?

Several students attended different religious services. One visited a Greek Orthodox church where the service wasn't in English and noted visual aids would have helped—a useful insight for an ESL class.

Another student joined a tightly knit Native American/white congregation. She was so worried about the rituals and "acting right" that she couldn't pick up the sermon.

Straight students visited gay bars and reported a desire to feel welcome—they wanted someone to just say hello.

"They learned how important it is for the majority culture to reach out to the minority, and for teachers to create a more welcoming culture," says Wiest.

One student stood in a food stamp line and deduced that these families wouldn't have money for a field trip. And she realized the need to be dollar-conscious when making assignments.

Impact:
"I think the greatest value was making my students realize how we put ourselves in a comfort zone," says Wiest. "When they expressed anxiety about this one hour, I reminded them that cultural minorities deal with this 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

For More:
Contact Wiest at the University of Nevada, Reno, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Mail Stop 282, Reno, NV 89557, 702/784-4961, ext. 2022. Or E-mail: Wiest@unr.edu.

Tim Dunn

Action Plan for **Mathematics**

The Learning First Alliance, a coalition of NEA and 11 other education organizations, has released Every Child Mathematically Proficient: An Action Plan. *To bring U.S. students to world-class levels, the Alliance has set this goal:*

Virtually all students starting school this fall will complete a challenging, coherent, and focused K-12 mathematics curriculum that includes core concepts of Algebra and Geometry early enough and with progressively increasing depth so that the content covered in current Algebra I and Geometry courses is mastered by the end of ninth grade.

Mastery of these subjects in the middle grades is essential for access to the higher levels of mathematics necessary for admission to college or good jobs after high school.

For a copy of *Every Child Mathematically Proficient*, visit the Web at www.learningfirst.org.

Students &

Good Stuff

Teaching and Change
The experiences of real classroom teachers working to change their schools to make good practice possible are brought to life in *Teaching and Change*, a quarterly journal published by the NEA Professional Library and Corwin Press. Recent issues have tackled topics such as inspiring quality in your school and professional development schools. A one-year subscription costs $40. To order, contact Corwin Press, 2455 Teller Rd., Thousand Oaks, CA 91320-2218, 805/499-9774, Fax 800/41-SCHOOL. Send E-mail to order@corwinpress.com. Or visit the Web at www.corwinpress.com.

Classroom Democracy
In *Beyond the Silence: Listening for Democracy*, educators reflect on the essential elements of a democratic classroom—one where students, teachers, and paraprofessionals all have a voice in the decisions that are made. And students explain why they learn best in classrooms that allow them the opportunity to pose problems and work out solutions. $17 plus $4 s&h from Heinemann. To order, call 800/225-5800 or visit the Web at www.heinemann.com.

Troubled Youth
"Strategies for Reaching Disruptive and Angry Youth: Creating Caring Schools and Communities," a conference sponsored by the National Educational Service, will feature experts discussing a wide range of positive prevention and intervention strategies, plus ways to develop action plans for individual schools and communities. April 22-23 in Chicago, Illinois. $285 for individuals; group discounts available. Contact the National Educational Service, 1252 Loesch Rd., Bloomington, IN 47404, 800/733-6786, Fax 812/ 336-7790. Send E-mail to nes@nesonline.com or visit the Web at www.nesonline.com.

Today's Curse
In *What To Do When Your Students Talk Dirty*, Timothy Jay discusses personal and cultural values, popular culture, what federal and state laws cover, and what you can do about bad language. $15.95 plus $3 s&h from Resource Publications, 888/273-7782.

You know you have a problem when . . .
"Your car is stolen out of the parking lot—and your school is next to the police station."
Linda Keith, second grade teacher, Mobile, Alabama

Dilemma

Picking Up the Pieces

What do you do when a student damages your personal property?

Last year, two of my students—well over 200 pounds each—got into a fight. Before I could break them up, they broke my coffee mug, pencil holder, and a music cassette for class. Replacing these items cost about $25.

I submitted a damage report to my administrator, and the kids were billed $12.50 each. One student's mother paid. The other student never paid and eventually dropped out of school.

He still owes the school $12.50, plus money for other charges. If he ever wants a school transcript released, he'll have to pay the debts first.

Maggie Bartley
Tenth grade government teacher
Burtonsville, Maryland

Recently, I took my parents' video camera to school to tape some of my classes. One of my students knocked the camera over, and the repair shop said the cost of repair would exceed the value of the camera.

Our school's insurance representative said the school's policy would not cover the damage, but he suggested I talk to my own insurance company.

I found that my own homeowner's insurance would pay for damage up to $500, since the camera was under my care and belonged to someone else.

Susie Stevens
High school biology and chemistry teacher
Ada, Oklahoma

I offer a couple of choices. Students can either pay me for the item in small prearranged weekly or monthly payments. Or they can work the item off after school by helping me in the classroom with bulletin boards, lab set-ups, and other tasks.

Jennifer Hagel
High school science and health teacher
Steeleville, Illinois

Ted Pitts

At the beginning of the school year, my students go through an etiquette unit that includes what to do when an accident occurs with someone else's property. The students apologize, ask what they can do to fix the problem, and may even take the damaged object home to try to fix it (along with a note explaining the situation).

Marcia Chambers
Fourth grade teacher
Lancaster, Wisconsin

Several years ago, I was awakened by our local police. They asked me to step outside, where I found trees had been sawed down, obscenities painted on my driveway, and more.

I videotaped the damage, which totaled more than $3,100. My insurance company paid for the damage under my homeowner's policy.

A few months later, I was informed that two high school students were bragging about how they trashed my property. I contacted the police. Upon investigation, the students gave the names of the other students involved.

I reported these students to their school administration. The principal took no action. So the students were apprehended and were ordered to be at my house with their parents.

I showed them the videotape. Each student had to apologize to me and my family. The students, represented by legal counsel, each paid their share of the damages to avoid prosecution. I then reimbursed the insurance company.

Ritchey Ricci
Administrator
Easton, Pennsylvania

I try to use the incident as a teachable moment, asking the student, "What would you do if it were your property that was damaged?"

Students usually come up with very realistic solutions to the problem and understand accountability for their actions. If their response suggests inflicting harm on another person, I speak to them about how violence is not any solution to the problem.

Duane Schunk
Seventh grade social studies teacher
Memphis, Michigan

Got an Answer?

What's your most effective technique to keep students' minds from wandering?
Send your answer by regular mail, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail to dilemma 2@neatoday.nea.org. Please include your job title and grade level, if applicable.

Published respondents will receive a bright *NEA Today* mug!

Strategies

You know you've been successful when . . .

"All students know what they are to do next, and they have the skills and knowledge to do it."

Maureen Looker, high school computer lab educational assistant, Columbus, Ohio

Delight

Adds Up to Better Learning

Tennessee students pair with an auto manufacturer to learn a lot more than how to sell cars.

You'd expect adults in Spring Hill, Tennessee, to be big fans of the Saturn Corporation, since it's the town's largest employer.

But now the ranks of those fans include fourth and fifth graders at Spring Hill Elementary. They're all part of a 12-week program created by fourth grade teacher Dan Doty "to teach the students that the skills they learn in class are used in the real world."

As part of the program, students are working on 12 television commercials for Saturn, the school's business partner.

"They're learning key skills—higher level thinking, team building, and consensus decision-making," says Doty.

He adds that the project develops skills that may bolster student achievement in the state's comprehensive exams.

The program took root early in the school year when Saturn asked how it could best spend its partnership money on its adopted school. Doty suggested that the company help fourth and fifth graders make a commercial promoting its cars.

"Saturn thought it was a great idea," says Doty. Ad executives quickly pulled together a 12-step advertising plan for students, 75 percent of whose parents work for Saturn. Doty and fifth grade teacher Sean Bell worked with the company's corporate communications staff to match each step with skills they were already teaching.

Then this past January, the project "Ads to Learning" was launched. Spring Hill's 300 fourth and fifth graders visited the nearby Saturn plant to observe the production of cars and meet the team who builds them.

Students learned how Saturn cars differ from other cars. Executives from Saturn's San Francisco ad agency gave an overview of the advertising process. By the time the students left the Saturn facilities, they were "very excited and motivated," says Bell.

Peyton Hogue

Tennessee fourth grade teacher Dan Doty tours the Saturn automotive plant with his students—all part of a learning campaign to bring lessons alive.

Next, the students were taught advertising concepts by members of Saturn's corporate communications department. Core subjects plus art and music were infused into the lessons, along with skill-building exercises.

Students learned to define their goals and gather consumer information, including demographics and environmental, economic, and social factors that influence their audience's purchases. While they created charts, tables, graphs, and maps, they learned about the law of supply and demand.

They brainstormed ideas and executed them through storyboards, "which taught them the importance of sequence and order and how to express themselves through art," says Doty.

Students videotaped and edited their ads and added background music. From that, they gained a concept of elapsed time and were introduced to the trials of putting critical product information within a 30- or 60-second time frame.

Students will test their ideas with consumers, including parents and other members of the community. And the toughest assignment may lay ahead, when they'll have to determine how best to use their advertising dollars. "That's when math will again come into play," says Bell.

There's no guarantee that Saturn will use the ads. But the company may include footage of students making their commercials in other ads in the future.

That doesn't matter to Doty, who says, "My biggest hope for this project has been for the kids to say that life can be fun—and that they understand that what they're learning is relevant to their lives."

In the end, Doty notes, students in Spring Hill "are realizing that they have to learn to get a decent job."

For More Information

Contact Dan Doty at 931/486-2291, Fax 931/486-2294, or send E-mail to dan doty@edge.net.

Idea Exchange

Taping Radio Programs

NEA Today occasionally notes radio programs of interest to educators. If these were television programs, we could avoid missing them by setting our VCRs.

Here's how I catch radio shows of special value. I purchased a digital timer at Radio Shack for about $30. Then, by connecting my radio-cassette recorder to the timer, I get an "audio VCR."

Sid Marker
Silver Spring, Maryland

A Break in Lab

As a chemistry teacher with a limited budget, I had to come up with a way to minimize breakage during labs. I find that by posting all replacement costs of equipment before each lab, along with safety and usage advice, breakage is reduced to a minimum.

When breakage occurs, I request payment immediately. If students don't have funds, their names go up on the board till payment is made. Cash only—although debts can be worked off.

Susan Smith
Mill Valley, California

The Cost of Smoking

In discussing tobacco use with your students, try using economics and some simple math:

Take the cost of a pack of cigarettes and multiply that times the number of packs estimated to be smoked by month, year, and over a lifetime.

Compare the lifetime cost to the price of a new car. My students came to the conclusion that the total cost of a lifetime of smoking would have bought three new cars.

Lucille Landby
Warroad, Minnesota

Share Your Ideas

You can pass along your tips to *NEA Today*'s more than 2.4 million readers in one of five ways:

- By mail: *NEA Today*, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036
- By phone: 202/822-7201
- By fax: 202/822-7206
- By E-mail: Ideas@neatoday.nea.org
- Through the Web: www.nea.org/neatoday

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**NEA family members include parents, spouse, domestic partner and children.

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Inside Scoop

News on Brain Gain

As research reveals more of how the human brain works, educators and scientists are contemplating how the new findings will affect current perceptions of teaching and learning.

What does the latest brain research tell us?

Children come into the world with an incredibly flexible brain that's constantly changing and packed with billions of cells or neurons—more than they'll ever use.

Scientists have coined the term "plasticity" to describe the brain's ability to undergo physical and chemical changes—growing new connections in enriched environments and losing many connections when the stimulation isn't there.

Windows for development close early in some areas. A baby born with vision-clouding cataracts, for example, will be forever blind if sight isn't restored by age two or three, because cells that process visual stimulation will wither or move on to other tasks. For the same reason, children born deaf won't acquire spoken language if they haven't heard the human voice by around age 10.

So if a child is neglected at a young age, is all hopeless?

No. But early intervention is critical to overcoming problems caused by lack of brain stimulation. Research by Craig Ramey at the University of Alabama has shown that such intervention can even raise the IQ scores of infants from impoverished environments as much as 15 to 30 percent.*

The years between infancy and elementary school graduation are critical for brain building. But all isn't lost if a child hasn't jumped into violin or French lessons by age three.

"There's no reason a person of 50 couldn't learn to play the violin," says Robert Sylwester, professor emeritus of education at the University of Oregon and author of *A Celebration of Neurons: An Educator's Guide to the Human Brain*. "Just don't book Carnegie Hall."

What does all this mean for teaching and learning?

"When something is fun, when an activity is hands-on, kids remember it," says Pat Wolfe, a former classroom teacher who's now a consultant specializing in the application of brain research to education practice.

"What brain research is doing is validating what good teachers have always done," she notes.

Parts of the brain haven't changed in thousands of years, Wolfe explains. When an activity has emotion attached, there's a chemical release in the brain that increases the strength of the memory of the event. Role-playing, simulations, cooperative groupings can all trigger emotions, making learning more memorable.

But too much emotion can disrupt learning. "There's a fight or flight response," says Wolfe. When emotions get too high, lots of things, including memory, shut down and energy gets directed toward survival.

"What we need in schools is a high-challenge, emotionally exciting, but low-threat environment," she says.

That's not so easy, especially during the turbulent pre-teen and teen years when just being called on in class or getting a pimple can be a high-threat situation.

So getting to know students as individuals—and understanding what triggers their negative emotions—is important. But that's difficult when class sizes are large or if 150 students pass through your room each day, says Wolfe.

Possible answers: Small teams with fully integrated curriculum, where teachers meet with the same students all day. Or block scheduling, where time's spent on hands-on projects and not just longer lectures. These set-ups make it easier to successfully incorporate positive emotion into activities.

What's the best way to engage students' brains?

Results of the latest brain research make a strong case for the role of the arts in education. "It's a pretend world where kids get to carry out functions in a rehearsal setting—to get up, do stuff and interact with each other," says education professor Sylwester.

In her workshops, Wolfe brainstorms with educators on integrating the arts into the curriculum. Brain-compatible teaching should include music, for example, for much more than just the early learning of the alphabet and counting games. The brain simply does a better job of retaining information connected with rhythm and rhyme.

Today's school and the brain—a mismatch?

We need to remember that thousands of years ago there was no school, says Sylwester.

"Kids were absorbed into the life of the community and learned what they needed to learn," he notes. "In school, we remove kids from the normal course of life. We don't expect them to be productive yet. And we give them answers to questions they didn't ask."

Putting 30 children in a room and giving them information they might need later on is counterproductive, says Sylwester. "To simply think without the opportunity to act is not what the brain is designed to do."

"We have school systems set up for the industrial age—for children who were going on the assembly line," says Wolfe. "But 80 percent of kids entering kindergarten in 2000 will be in jobs that don't even exist today."

There's lots of work to do to restructure education in a way that fully stimulates today's young minds, says Wolfe. But she's encouraged.

"I've been doing staff development for 20 years and I've never seen such excitement as in my workshops on brain research," Wolfe notes.

"Finally, teachers are being treated as professionals," she says, "and are being given a scientific knowledge base for what they do."

*See the April 1999 *NEA Today* Innovators section for an interview with Craig Ramey.

A No-Brainer?

From birth to age 10, the brain builds synapses—connections among brain cells—at a rate of up to 3 billion per second. After age 10, that process stops. Despite these facts, some indicators show the United States hasn't yet recognized the early childhood years as a crucial time for learning.

Consider:

About 12 percent of infants born in the U.S.
suffer significant reduction of their cognitive ability as a result of poor prenatal education and care. Twenty-five percent of all pregnant women in the United States receive no prenatal care.

The early childhood years
receive the least emphasis in federal, state, and local programs. The United States spends seven times more on the elderly than it does on children from birth to age 5.

About half of all U.S. children
are in full-time day care within their first year. But many day care centers are underfunded and staffed by undertrained, low-paid workers.

Source: "What Do We Know from Brain Research?" *Educational Leadership*, November 1998. ©Pat Wolfe and Ron Brandt.

For More Information

■ *Magic Trees of the Mind: How to Nurture Your Child's Intelligence, Creativity, and Healthy Emotions from Birth through Adolescence* by Marian Diamond and Janet Hopson discusses many of the latest findings on brain development. $13.95 from Dutton. Available in local bookstores.

■ The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development offers a wealth of resources on how the brain learns, including an audiotape, *Translating Brain Research into Educational Practice*, with Pat Wolfe ($47.95 for non-members). For more information, call 800/933-ASCD or visit the Web at www.ascd.org.

Update

■ *An Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform* has been revised since *NEA Today* reported on it in this column last month.

The Edison Project has been removed from the report because the research firm compiling the ratings decided that not enough data was available for an accurate assessment.

For a copy of the guide, visit the NEA Web site at www.nea.org or check with your local or state Association.

Professional

Good Stuff

Safe Schools
The Teaching and Learning Institute, sponsored by NEA and the Stetson University Center, is offering a "Safe Schools" workshop on April 8-11 for educators looking for innovative ways to make schools safe for students. Classes will be held at the Stetson University Center in Florida. Tuition is $475. Upon completion, a participant will receive a certificate worth 45 in-service hours. For more information, contact Melissa Scholes, Stetson University Center, 510 Campus St., Celebration, FL 34747, 407/566-1620, E-mail: center@stetson.edu. Or visit the Web at www.stetson.edu/academy.

Multi-age and Looping
National experts and practitioners will be on hand at the seventh annual National Conference on Multi-age and Looping Practices, July 18-21 in Columbus, Ohio. For more information, contact the Society for Developmental Education, 10 Sharon Rd., Peterborough, NH 03458-0577, 800/462-1478. Or visit the Web at www.socdeved.com.

Reading, Writing
Successful Classrooms: Effective Teaching Strategies for Raising Achievement in Reading & Writing, a one-hour video featuring NEA members Sandra Rief and Nancy Fetzer, offers strategies for building an effective K-6 reading program. *Successful Schools: How To Raise Achievement & Support 'At-Risk' Students* covers discipline, classroom management, and lowering referral rates to special ed. Each video costs $74 plus $5 s&h from Educational Resource Specialists, P.O. Box 19207, San Diego, CA 92159, 800/682-3528, Fax 619/286-3528, E-mail: rief@compuserve.com.

What To Expect . . .
What challenges do first-year teachers face in the classroom—and how could they be better prepared to face them? Award-winning first-year teachers answer these questions—and veteran teachers offer their advice—in "What To Expect Your First Year of Teaching," a report from the Department of Education on the Web at www.ed.gov/pubs/FirstYear/.

You know you have a problem when . . .

"The most likely answer to any question you ask is: 'Who cares?'"

Connice Ross, special education teacher, Memphis, Tennessee

Dilemma

Making Music Together

Volunteers, parents, staff—what's the best way to coordinate all the adults at your work site?

Ted Pitts

At the beginning of the year, I send a form home listing times and days and asking for volunteers. Then I slot people into the time they requested.

Of course, I have volunteers who just show up and check into the office ready to work. I don't want to turn them away, so for those people, I have baskets with items in them. One basket will have a number of reading games—a volunteer can come in and take one of the games and work with a group of children. Another basket will contain math games.

A couple of volunteers also work as "reading buddies," reading one-on-one with a child and then having the child retell the story and fill out a book report form.

Helen Faul
First grade teacher
Oxnard, California

My school has a very successful volunteer program. To make it work, we have a project team that meets monthly to coordinate staff/student needs with our parent, business, and community volunteers.

Barb Scott
First grade teacher
Grand Rapids, Michigan

We struggled with this scheduling dilemma until we decided to:

- Compile a questionnaire asking parents to check the items listed that they would be interested in doing in the classroom—working with small groups, working on the computer, cooking, reading. Parents also needed to list the best times and days that would work for them.
- Compile a list of jobs, times, and days on the computer. Then we fit this into our schedule. For us, it works out to having one or two people for an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon.
- After the schedule is complete, we make a monthly calendar showing each person's name, date, and time they'll be working. We send home a new calendar each month.

Suzanne Nayback
Shelly Novotny
Elementary teachers, multi-age class
Petoskey, Michigan

I am retired. Last winter, I was volunteering in a first grade classroom in Carlsbad, California. Here's how the teacher, Mrs. Cooney, coordinated the adults in her classroom.

All volunteers were given written instructions. They included:

Enter the room quietly and make eye contact with me. If I touch my finger to my lips, wait until I have acknowledged you before you call for a student. Go to a work station and be ready to call the student. Model good behavior by looking at me, not at students.

Mrs. Cooney had three work stations around the room. At each, she had a list of students, work assignments, and stick-on notes the students could use to indicate if they'd done the assignment. That way, the volunteer knew which student to call next.

George Beyer
Retired high school teacher
Bigfork, Montana

Volunteers aren't always dependable. I don't want to discourage them, but I don't want to hold up progress if they haven't completed their job. So I give volunteers individual reading enrichment jobs.

I keep books in baggies, complete with worksheets and follow-up activities. The student can choose a baggie, read the book, and do the activity with the volunteer. If the volunteer doesn't show up or is late, it doesn't matter.

Mary Ann Herring
Third grade teacher
Fulton, Missouri

Got an Answer?

How do you make the time to collaborate with your colleagues?
Send your answer by regular mail, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail at dilemma2@neatoday.nea.org. Please include your job title and grade level.

Published respondents will receive a bright new *NEA Today* mug!

Growth

You know you've been successful when . . .

"People at school say, 'I heard about what you've been doing. Tell me more—I'd like to try it.'"

Fran Bellinger, seventh/eighth grade health and physical education teacher, Kaneohe, Hawaii

Delight

Lifeline to the City Schools

New teachers stick with tough city assignments with the help of veteran peers.

Bridgeport, Connecticut, like many urban cities, had to find a way to stanch the flow of new teachers leaving for jobs in the more prosperous suburbs.

Overcrowded classrooms, deteriorating facilities, a largely disadvantaged student population, and low salaries make it difficult for these educators to stay in city schools, says Mary Lou Weiner, first vice president of the Bridgeport Education Association. So in 1997, she launched the local's Peer Assistance Program.

Funded by an NEA Urban Grant, the program pairs mentor teachers with new educators to help them "survive" their first years. The mentors assist with everything from classroom management strategies, lesson plans, and student assessments to state certification requirements.

And the program breaks the isolation that can add to the burden of a first-year teacher.

"Pay is only part of the reason the attrition rate is so atrocious here," says mentor Nick Nicholson, a 20-year veteran who teaches technology and science at Bridgeport Regional Vocational Aquaculture School.

"Teachers still perceive suburban schools as easier, with less violence and less poverty," Nicholson notes. So he tries "to support newcomers and make it easier for them to stay in the system."

For first-year biology teacher Carla Ebmeyer, Nicholson is a "lifesaver."

"He makes sure I'm aware of Association meetings, helps me find money for supplies, and keeps me informed of the many requirements for the state's BEST [Beginning Educators' Support and Training] program."

Recently, Nicholson arranged for the local Association to purchase audiotapes to help Ebmeyer prepare for a BEST exam.

In addition to sharing his experience in classroom management, "Nick tells me I'm doing a good job—and that really helps," says Ebmeyer.

Kirk Shadle, a second-year environmental science teacher, says: "The first year of teaching is stressful. But being able to get immediate answers from a mentor, talk about your experiences, and meet with other new teachers on a professional level is very beneficial."

Both Shadle and Ebmeyer point to Nicholson as the person who helped them learn how to handle disruptive students.

For More Information

Contact Mary Lou Weiner at 203/579-2867, Fax 203/382-0579, or E-mail Mlwbpt@aol.com.

"If it weren't for this program," says Ebmeyer, "I would've felt very alone."

The peer assistance program encourages newcomers to build professional relationships and collaborate in solving problems. Each participant has a list of others in the program, so support is only a phone call away.

The program also features guest speakers who cover topics such as changes in state certification requirements, how to prepare for BEST portfolio assessments, and teacher evaluations.

Of the 26 new educators active in the peer assistance program in 1997, six resigned from urban schools.

During this school year, 43 newly hired teachers have participated in the program. "There have been no resignations," Nicholson notes. "I'd like to think we're responsible for that."

"Here, new teachers are treated professionally," says Weiner, a second grade teacher at High Horizons Magnet School.

Still, she adds, 105 teachers who didn't participate in the Association's program left Bridgeport schools between June and November 1998.

"Nothing happens overnight," says Weiner. "It's a slow process."

Photos by A. J. Wolfe

Supporting Carla Ebmeyer's lesson on throat cultures (above) and Kirk Shadle's lab lesson on trout is a peer assistance program to help young educators thrive.

Idea Exchange

Note the Restroom

Our building has stumbled onto a morale booster. On a little table in the staff restroom, someone placed a pad and pen. Then, one by one, we began leaving anonymous, encouraging notes.

Some are silly, some are inspirational, some are cries for help. The dialogue that appeared has brought us closer together and helped us through tornadoes as well as the ordinary day-to-day routine.

Staff members absent for a day or two even go back to read what they missed. It's given new meaning to visiting the "comfort station" or the "restroom."

Joyce Fulcher
Madison, North Carolina

Notebooks, Not Folders

I'm always cutting items from magazines, printing pages from the Internet, and writing down ideas from other teachers. I kept losing these items in the file folders where I stored them.

Now I put them in three-ring binders that I label with the content. I divide each notebook into subdivisions—for example, cooperative learning, portfolios, literary genres, enrichment activities. This system makes it much easier to find something when I need it.

Kim Steele
Garden City, Kansas

Works4Me
nea's e-mail classroom tip of the week!

Have a great idea? Pass along your tips to *NEA Today*, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail: ideas@neatoday.nea.org.

For more tips, check out NEA's weekly E-mail service, Works4Me. To sign up, send an E-mail to lyris@list.nea.org.

- In the "subject" line, type: sign me up, NEA!
- In the message block, type: subscribe Works4Me
- Send the message.

To submit your own tip, E-mail it to: owner-Works4Me @list.nea.org.

Bits & Bytes

Bytes for Beginners

Some of my seventh graders want to include their photos along with their work on my school's Web site. We don't have a formal policy covering student photos on school Web pages. How are other schools handling this?

The need for a policy about whether—and how—minor students should be represented on the Internet is primarily motivated by two concerns:

- student safety, and
- school and practitioner liability.

Keeping children safe in the virtual world is, for the most part, a matter of using common sense. Rule number one in every online safety guide is ensuring that kids understand just what information about themselves or their schools they can freely transmit.

The potential for schools or educators to find themselves entangled in litigious predicaments after having posted photographs of their students on the Internet is remote. Yet the fear of litigation prompts some school officials to strongly discourage identifying students in any part of a Web page.

Most schools include guidelines about posting minor students' pictures on the Web in their Acceptable Use Policies. In addition, almost every school requires written permission from parents before *any* student information makes it onto the Web.

Want two good examples of schools that are dealing with this issue? Go to:

- Amphitheater School District, Arizona (www.amphi.com/depts/technology/k5.htm)
- St. Charles School District, Illinois (www.chicago.avenew.com/comnity/educate/kane.d303/Guide/www3.htm).

For an in-depth review about child safety on the Internet, visit www.safekids.com/index.html.

Have ideas, comments, or questions about technology? You can E-mail webeditor@dear.nea.org or write to Dear Webeditor, NEA Center for Education Technology, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Check out www.nea.org/cet for more questions from beginners and answers from the experts.

My favorite Web site . . .

Chemistry Teaching Resources (www.anachem.umu.se/eks/pointers.htm) is very comprehensive. I've found curriculum guides, periodic tables, and software.

Sam Fleming, high school chemistry teacher, Semmes, Alabama

Wired Classroom

A Search Engine Just for Kids

KidsClick! (http://sunsite.Berkeley.edu/KidsClick!/) is a combination search engine/Web guide for children.

Developed by librarians with a Library Services and Technology Act grant, KidsClick! not only filters out non-kid-friendly sites, but also points kids in the direction of good sites and provides a focused roadmap of the entire information superhighway. And KidsClick! doesn't have the distracting commercial aspect of sites like Yahooligans!

I haven't hit any deadends yet, and the information is wide-ranging and appropriate for elementary and middle school students. I use KidsClick! as the home site for my school's Web browers.

Dorothy Natoli
Library media specialist
Salisbury, Massachusetts

KidsClick!
web search for kids by librarians
Search word(s): Search -or, Advanced Search
Search subjects by letter: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
Facts/Current Events
Encyclopedias, Dictionaries, Trivia, News, Holidays, Calendars, more...
Science & Math
Animals, Natural Disasters, Space, Math, Experiments, Dinosaurs, more...
Fine Arts
Drawing, Coloring, Art Museums, Songs, Art by Children, Musical Instruments, more...
Weird & Mysterious
Ghosts, ESP, Witchcraft, Monsters, Aliens, Disappearances, more...
Health & Well-Being
Medicine, Disabilities, Family Life, AIDS, Exercise, Parenting, more...
Popular Entertainments
Rock Music, Movies, TV Networks & Shows, Toys, Comic Books, Celebrities, more...
Religion & Mythology
Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Bible, Religion (General), Mythology, more...
Home & Household
Food, Pets, Hobbies, Crafts, Gardening, Babysitting, more...
Sports & Recreation
Team Sports, Games, Camping, Fishing, Olympics, Horsemanship, Martial Arts, more...
Society & Government
Law, Schools, Politics, Military, Business, Minorities, Organizations, more...
Machines & Transportation
Cars, Inventions, Spacecraft, Planes, Trains, Robots, more...
Literature
Stories, Poetry, Humor, Authors, Books, Jokes, Book Lists, more...
Reading, Writing, Speaking
Grammar, Foreign Languages, Spelling, Composition, Vocabulary, Writing, more...
Computers/The Internet
Software, Programming, Internet, Key Pals, Computer Games, Online Games, more...
Geography/History/Biography
Regions, Cities, Biography, States, History, Folklore, more...

Yackety-Mac?

Macintosh computers have been able to speak text aloud since 1985, but I rarely see a classroom computer take advantage of this capability.

Text-to-speech options vary in the amount of RAM and horsepower they use. MacinTalk 2 provides 10 fairly robot-like voices, but it can work with a Mac Plus—and any Mac since.

MacinTalk Pro uses a dictionary of more than 65,000 words plus 5,000 common U.S. names, and can correctly pronounce prices and read certain abbreviations in context. For example, "Dr. Green lives on Green Dr." is not a challenge. The voices (male and female) are particularly lifelike, but you'll need around 2 megabytes of RAM just to hold them!

The free text editor that comes with every Macintosh, Simple Text, will read aloud any highlighted text. If nothing is highlighted, the whole page will be read aloud.

Students with limited sight vocabularies and other reading problems might find it helpful to click on a word and have it pronounced for them.

I use text-to-speech functions to help me proof rough drafts. A spelling checker won't notice subject/verb problems, but they'll be obvious when you hear them pronounced out loud.

Philip Bowser
School psychologist
Roseburg, Oregon

Music and Science

I've developed a Web site that combines science and music, called The Virtual Museum of Music Inventions, at www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/6553.

The Museum contains photo exhibits and descriptions of musical instruments created by elementary school students.

You'll find teaching tips for an interdisciplinary unit about sound as well as links to Web sites about historic or unusual instruments.

Educators are welcome to join this project. Just have your students make their own instruments and write brief descriptions of how they are made and how they produce sound. To find out how to submit materials, go to the Museum site.

Elizabeth Rexford
Music teacher
Oak Park, Illinois

Creating News Broadcasts

My leadership class wanted a way to report goings-on at school. We researched many ideas and decided on a news broadcast that would be played over the school's closed-circuit television system.

We already had a video camera, so all we needed was the equipment to edit the broadcast.

We chose Avid Cinema software and bought a Macintosh G3 All in One computer. Avid Cinema allows you to easily bring video into your computer, edit it, and add special effects, titles, and audio. The program is easy to use, and the kids love working with it.

Avid Cinema has improved communication skills and made students independent workers and critical thinkers. The software could be used in any class for multimedia projects.

Randy Heath
Middle school teacher
Tacoma, Washington

Want a weekly tip on using technology? Subscribe to the Wired Classroom E-mail list. Just send an E-mail to ***joinetoolsweekly@list.nea.org*** *(no subject or message needed).*

My favorite software . . .

HRW Language Workshop CD ($37.47, 800/225-5425) assesses weaknesses and makes prescriptions for each student. Kids seem to *enjoy* grammar instruction!

Linda Bennett, seventh grade language arts teacher, Sylvester, Georgia

Friendly User

Jump Online, the Water's Fine

Kids around the world are studying pond ecology, courtesy of three Utah educators.

Who:
Brandon Thacker, instructional specialist, Davis School District; Dwight Brown, biology teacher, Bountiful High School; and Nancy Frazier, second grade teacher, Meadowbrook Elementary School, Bountiful, Utah

E-mail:
bthacker@etc.dist.davis.k12.ut.us

Inspiration:
Thacker, Brown, and Frazier wanted to find a way for students to collaborate over the Internet. A project on pond ecology seemed to fit the bill.

"We wanted to dissolve classroom walls and spread science and math throughout multiple classrooms," Thacker explains.

So they won a grant, Thacker designed the ExplorA-Pond Web site, Brown wrote the science lessons, and Frazier made sure the lessons were appropriate for kids in grades K-6.

ExplorA-Pond not only helps students learn how math and science principles affect pond ecology, but it offers a place where students can share their findings, says Thacker.

By publishing data online, he explains, students in Utah can easily compare their pond to, say, a pond dug by students at a school in Wales.

And when students have an international audience, Thacker says, "the incentive is to be accurate and use standard English. It raises the quality of the work. Students are no longer writing for teachers, they're writing for their peers. That's similar to what we do as scientists."

Lesson:
For Frazier, ExplorA-Pond has become a natural link between her indoor science lab and the outdoor classroom set up around Barton Creek, which meanders behind the elementary school.

With questions prompted by field work, students now have a place to go other than the library. The ExplorA-Pond site has generated a very active line of research, Frazier says.

Here's how: Students from anywhere in the world who have Internet access can log on to the ExplorA-Pond site and post a question on "Pond Talk," a link for discussion and debate.

"It's so much fun to let students initiate the learning and the questions," Frazier adds.

Kids can also populate the online "Virtual Pond" by picking the number of minnows, bass, algae, mosquito larvae, and other critters. A computer program then runs an 18-week simulation of how the pond will fare.

Students can take a virtual site tour of Barton Creek in the site's "outdoor classroom," or add their own pond particulars to the "Adopt-A-Pond" online database.

For More Information

Go to ExplorA-Pond, at www.uen.org/utahlink/pond/ to join the exploration. You'll also find "Pond Action"—pond lessons and activities for grades K-6—as well as Internet links to other math and science projects.

Click:
"We as educators have to pull technology into our teaching skills and methods, because that's the students' world out there and we have to connect," says Frazier.

Adds Thacker: "The Internet can help implement the science standards that encourage kids to come up with a hypothesis based on a comparison of pictures or experimental data."

Steve Wilson

Utah teacher Nancy Frazier and her students collect data from Barton Creek, which runs behind their school. Back inside where it's dry, they enter their findings into a database on the ExplorA-Pond Web site and compare notes with kids from all over the world.

New & Noteworthy

Have Limited Resources?
Ideas and Strategies for the One-Computer Classroom contains many classroom-tested ideas to get the most out of limited resources. You'll find ideas for classroom management and recordkeeping, as well as word processing, database, and spreadsheet activities. $24.95. To order, call ISTE at 800/336-5191.

Native American Artists
At the Potlatch is new software that teaches students about the art tradition of Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest. For a complete description, go to www.pentewa.com/html/potlatch.html. $19.95. Phone or Fax your order to 206/329-5519, or write to Pentéwa interACTIVE, 833 33rd Ave. South, Seattle, WA 98144.

Make Your Own Puzzles
Visit Puzzlemaker at www.puzzlemaker.com for help creating puzzles and games. You can create mazes, word searches, crossword puzzles, number blocks, math squares, and cryptograms.

Free Software
The nonprofit Educational Software Cooperative brings together folks with an interest in educational software. ESC's Web site, at www.edu-soft.com, has links to sites where free educational software can be downloaded.

Tech Buyer's Guide
The new *Scholastic School Technology Guide* is now available. This is a buyer's guide that covers the school technology market. $49.95. To order, call 800/724-6527.

Talk to Us

Have a nifty classroom tip or lesson plan that uses technology? E-mail a description (under 200 words, please!) to **wiredclassroom@list.nea.org**.

Is there a Web site, CD-ROM, or piece of software you can't live without? E-mail your favorites—and why you love them—to **myfavoritetech@list.nea.org**.

Or send your responses by regular mail to *NEA Today*, or by Fax to 202/822-7206, or through the Web at www.nea.org/cet.

Those published here will receive a sparkling *NEA Today* mug!

Health

From the Network

The NEA Health Information Network suggests the following helpful resources.

Elmo Takes the Lead Out
The Sesame Street Lead Poisoning Prevention Project offers a lead poisoning awareness and prevention kit that includes a video (in English), audiocassette (English and Spanish), and 10 copies of the booklet/poster "Lead: The Silent Threat" (English and Spanish). For free copies or more information on lead poisoning, call the National Safety Council's lead information hotline at 800/424-LEAD.

Advice on Anorexia
Inner Hunger: A Young Woman's Struggle Through Anorexia and Bulimia helps readers understand and deal with anorexia and bulimia by combining one woman's personal story with practical advice for girls, parents, and educators. $22 plus $3.50 s&h from W.W. Norton, 800/233-4830.

Effective HIV Prevention
The Academy for Educational Development recently concluded a three-year evaluation of the New York City Public High Schools' HIV/AIDS and Condom Availability Program and other HIV programs for teens. *Protecting Youth, Preventing AIDS: A Guide for Effective High School HIV Prevention Programs* presents the findings, which discuss the components of an effective HIV prevention program, how to involve the school and community in the planning process, the development of supportive policies, and how to link such a program to other school and community services. The guide is reproducible, and master copies are available free of charge. To order, call 212/367-4565 or E-mail: aradosh@aed.org.

Breakfast Scorecard
The 1998 School Breakfast Scorecard, published by the Food Research and Action Center, outlines the basics of the School Breakfast Program and ranks states based on their use of the program. $7 from FRAC, 1875 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 540, Washington, DC 20009.

A Whiff of Growing Abuse

One in five students today will get high on inhalants by eighth grade. Harvey Weiss, executive director of the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition, spoke to NEA Health Information Network's Vicki Harrison about the rising trend of inhalant abuse.

What are inhalants?
Inhalants are legal, everyday products that can be misused—students breathe the gas or vapors with the purpose of reaching a high.

Things like typewriter correction fluid, nail polish remover, whipped cream, household glue, felt tip markers, hair spray, helium, nitrous oxide, aerosols, computer cleaner, and even cooking spray can be very dangerous if inhaled.

How widespread is inhalant use?
Surveys show that inhaling dangerous products is becoming one of the most widespread problems in the country. More than a million people used inhalants to get high last year alone.

Up until the eighth grade, inhalants are more popular than marijuana with young people. In fact, by the time students reach the eighth grade, one in five will have used inhalants.

Inhalants are an equal opportunity method of substance abuse. But statistics show that young, white males have the highest usage rates. Hispanic and American Indian populations also show high rates of usage.

Why are inhalants used?
They're generally inexpensive, and they're legal and easy to purchase. There's an inexhaustible supply—more than 1,000 different products can be misused, and they don't need to be concealed.

Also, adults often aren't aware that inhalant use is a problem, and young people are typically unaware of its consequences.

Ruben Cueto

What kind of damage do inhalants do to the body?
Many inhalants are thought to dissolve the protective myelin sheath that surrounds brain cells, resulting in cell death.

This can cause permanent personality changes, memory impairment, hallucinations, and learning disabilities. Inhalants can also do serious damage to the heart, liver, kidneys, bone marrow, and other organs.

And there's "sudden sniffing death syndrome"—death due to a sudden and unexpected disturbance of the heart's rhythm. This means that death can occur the first, 10th, or 100th time someone uses an inhalant.

What can you do if you think someone is "huffing"?
Make sure the room is well ventilated and call a medical professional for help. Once the individual has recovered, seek professional help from a school nurse, counselor, physician, or other health care worker. Be frank but not accusatory in discussions with youth about potential inhalant abuse.

If you suspect someone is under the influence of an inhalant, remain calm. Agitation may cause the huffer to become violent, experience hallucinations, or suffer heart dysfunction, which can lead to sudden sniffing death syndrome.

What signs are characteristic of inhalant users?
There's a link between inhalant use and problems in school—failing grades, chronic absences, and general apathy.

Other signs include paint stains on the body or clothing, spots or sores around the mouth, red or runny eyes or nose, chemical breath odor, drunk, dazed, or dizzy appearance, anxiety, excitability, irritability, nausea, and loss of appetite.

What can educators say to kids about inhalant use?
With younger students, educators can discuss the need for parental supervision and adequate ventilation when using cleaning products and glues. And it's important to talk about inhalants as chemicals or poisons, not just drugs.

For older kids, educators can teach and reinforce peer resistance skills.

All students should learn about the importance of oxygen to life and body functioning, including the negative effects of oxygen deprivation.

Resources

■ National Inhalants & Poisons Awareness Week is March 22-27. To draw attention to the growing problem of inhalant abuse, the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition is offering a free coordinator's kit, complete with background information, suggested activities, camera-ready art, sample letters to the editor, op-eds, radio scripts, and news releases. For more information or resources on inhalant abuse, call NIPC at 800/269-4237, send E-mail to nipc@io.com, or visit the Web at www.inhalants.org.

■ The video *Educate: Creating Inhalant Abuse Awareness Together* provides information on what inhalant abuse is, how to spot it, and where to go for help. Included are testimonials of two families who have lived through the tragedy of inhalant abuse and a first-person account from a former inhalant abuser. For a free video and brochure, call 800/269-4237, 800/488-DRUG, or 800/729-6686.

ESP Extra

A Job Well Done

Helping Students Make the Grade

This secretary helps college students succeed by nudging them toward independence.

Name:
Julie Stevenson

Job Title:
Secretary to the associate dean for liberal arts, Jefferson Community College, Watertown, New York

Experience:
30 years

NEA local affiliate:
Educational Support Staff at Jefferson Community College

What people don't understand about my job:
My job's different every day because I'm responsible for so many areas. More than simply acting as a liaison to the dean and to the teachers, I have to be completely informed about the college curriculum and student assistance services.

I keep up with the latest information and changes, then tap on my 30 years of experience to troubleshoot problems and help students make the best possible decisions.

What I do:
I assist the dean with confidential and routine work, but I also prepare personnel and academic paperwork for three departments within the liberal arts division.

As the division's "gatekeeper," I'm in the center of activity. In addition, I proctor exams as needed for teachers—serious business at the college level.

I also supervise the Student Aid Program, which places student workers in jobs throughout the division.

A large percentage of our 3,378 students come from nearby Fort Drum. So I've learned to adjust quickly when troops are deployed suddenly to Bosnia or elsewhere in the world and do my part to help with the stress of term interruptions.

In addition to military personnel, our students vary widely in ages from high schoolers to senior citizens. The stress is the same no matter what the age. I do my best to keep my eyes and ears open to help.

My goal is to do everything possible to help students avoid a failing class grade, including suggesting alternatives and pointing them in the direction of other campus resources.

My credentials:
I attended the Washington, D.C., School for Secretaries and have completed coursework toward a human services degree at JCC. I was president of my NEA local affiliate until just recently and have been adviser to a service-oriented sorority and a domestic violence/rape advocate at the local women's center.

"I impact, in a positive way, the careers and futures of the students whose lives I touch each day," says New York secretary and trouble-shooter Julie Stevenson. "I feel as if I'm the gatekeeper to the liberal arts division."

Peter Barber

Continuing education:
I've attended NEA/NY summer leadership institutes, national conferences for college women student leaders, a leadership development conference for trade union women, and various personal and skills development workshops. I also co-chaired the North Country "Women's Issues in the 90s" Conference a few years back.

How I help students achieve:
My goal is to help students become successfully independent—without doing the work for them. I point them in the right direction by knowing when and how to recommend a tutor or a visit to the learning skills center or financial aid office. This type of help can be invaluable to students.

Challenges I have met:
By buffering the tensions of grade appeals or tuition issues and applying the college guidelines with dignity and grace, I try to keep stress from bubbling over into a serious crisis.

How I team with teachers:
I've learned to take pride in my expertise and the role I play on decision-making teams.

Along with teachers, I've served on search committees for two deans and our president. I've also served on the Middle States Committee for Accreditation, the State Education Department Self-Study Steering Committee, the Disability Awareness Committee, and the College Senate Ad Hoc Committee of Awards and Recognition.

In addition, I team up with the associate dean in the day-to-day management of the liberal arts division.

Success in these areas wouldn't be possible without the support of the teachers and administrators in what I regard as an exceptionally collegial atmosphere.

—Tudi Harwood

To contact Julie Stevenson, send E-mail to julie_stevenson@ccmgate.sunyjefferson.edu.

Tips from Julie Stevenson

On Students and Colleagues

On dealing with students:
During exam time, students suffer from a lack of sleep, too much coffee, and jammed computers. It's important to make every effort to diffuse the tension before it turns into a real crisis.

My training as a domestic violence/rape advocate and experience as an "on-call" staff member has refined my ability to think clearly, quickly, and with compassion.

On dealing with other school employees:
I've worked hard to keep informed and, in turn, have been rewarded by invitations to lend my voice and opinions, on behalf of support personnel, in a welcoming setting.

To keep that going, it's important to deal immediately and honestly with any situation that might arise. Don't let things bubble and boil. Be straightforward and consistent.

News You Can Use

ESP Helping Kids Learn

Dealing With Disabilities

"By April or May, I still didn't know the alphabet and couldn't read . . . so I flunked second grade. . . .I was a woodshop major in high school, and my typical report card was two Cs, three Ds, and an F. I just got used to it. Though reading is still difficult for me, I do like reading. I like the written language because I like photocopying. I believe in double spacing, since it helps my business!"

These are the words of Paul Orfalea, whose dyslexia has made reading difficult his entire life, but who nevertheless founded and serves as the CEO of Kinko's.

Orfalea's story can be found in the "First Person" section of LDOnline, a comprehensive collection of advice and resources to help people deal with learning disabilities.

The LDOnline site, a service of the Learning Project at WETA in Washington, D.C., contains basic and in-depth information, online bulletin boards, an exhaustive calendar of workshops and conferences, first-person accounts, a Kids' Zone, and more. Look for it on the Web at http://ldonline.com.

Photographs by Rachelle Omenson

Have trouble getting support employees and teachers to work together to create the best possible learning environment for kids? In New Jersey, NEA members Patricia Legge, a teacher (above), and Bonnie Chalfant, a school bus driver, have joined forces to create and deliver "Building the Bridge," a workshop designed to help teachers and ESP see what they have in common and work for the common good.

Building Bridges

"Once you establish that teachers and ESP are partners with the same goals, the kids see it, and it makes a difference in their educations."

That's the philosophy behind the Building the Bridge workshops created and delivered by New Jersey Education Association members Bonnie Chalfant and Patricia Legge.

Building the Bridge brings support employees and teachers together to explore what they have in common and what they need to do to work more effectively to improve education.

Chalfant, an 18-year veteran bus driver, and Legge, a special education teacher, were introduced four years ago. Their relationship is a model of what they think support employees and teachers should strive for.

Chalfant reports that when the two of them attended NEA's 1997 ESP conference, some of the people they met were amazed that a teacher and a support employee could be friends.

In the past, Chalfant and Legge have delivered the workshop twice a year in their county. But, as participants spread the word about the workshop's value, the twosome is being asked to teach elsewhere in the state and around the country.

For details on Building the Bridge, contact Bonnie Chalfant, 77 Berkshire Rd., Sickerville, NJ 08081. E-mail: b_l_chalfant@yahoo.com.

A Lion for Librarians

Looking for an address on the Internet that will take you to a cornucopia of resources for school librarians?

Then take a look at LION, the Library Information Online Network. LION's home page, at www.libertynet.org/lion/lion.html, contains links to information on such subjects as cataloging, library lesson plans, parents' information, media education, and children's literature.

LION is sponsored by the Philadelphia school system's Library Services department.

Classroom Tranquility

"In an informal style classroom, a child may use a prone-on-elbows position to read, which is an excellent way to build scapular strength. A blanket defines space for a child with poor body awareness, and a fan drowns out distracting noises for the auditorily sensitive child."

In *Inspiring Tranquility: Stress Management in Learning Styles in the Inclusive Classroom*, authors Janet Gallaher and Rebecca Nunn provide easy-to-follow strategies for helping students and teachers relax and learn.

They give particular attention to the needs of at-risk students, students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and students with other learning disorders.

Inspiring Tranquility is published by the NEA Professional Library. To order ($10.95, stock #2592-6-00-PL), call 800/229-4200.

ESP Keeping Kids Safe, Healthy, and Well-Nourished

Are You Asthma-Friendly?

Does your school maintain good indoor air quality? Is there a school nurse in your school? Can children take medicines at school as recommended by their doctors and parents? Are they allowed to carry their own medicines? Does someone teach school staff about asthma and asthma management? Does someone teach all students about asthma and how to help a classmate who has it?

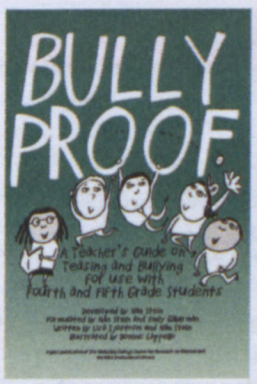
If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, your school is probably on the road to being "asthma-friendly."

Asthma, the leading chronic illness for children, can be life-threatening. More than 3,000 children die each year from asthma attacks.

For more on specific measures your school can take to help students avoid and manage asthma attacks, call the NEA Health Information Network at 800/718-8387 and request the free "Indoor Air Quality and You" packet. Or go to the Indoor Air Quality section of the HIN Web site, at www.nea.org/hin/air/.

Bullyproof Your School

What should students do when they see what they think is an incident of student-to-student sexual harassment in school?



According to the authors of a new guide for dealing with teasing and bullying, they should say, 'That's inappropriate behavior for school. It's not allowed here.'"

You'll find the details and dozens of other tips in *Bullyproof: A Teacher's Guide on Teasing and Bullying for Use with Fourth and Fifth Grade Students*.

A joint publication of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women and the NEA Professional Library, *Bullyproof* contains 11 core lessons, with accompanying handouts and homework assignments.

Bullyproof is available from the NEA Professional Library. To order ($15.95, stock #1873-7-00-PL), call 800/229-4200.

No Hitting, No Matter What

When students are taught that violence is wrong, no matter what the reason for it or who commits it, school principal and online expert Alpha Quincy says a school's climate improves, vandalism goes down, and learning goes up.

Quincy advocates school policies that ban corporal punishment and insist that teachers and students find alternatives to physical force to work out disagreements.

Quincy's essay is just one of the many items you can find on the Project NoSpank Web site—located at www.nospank.org—sponsored by Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education.

ESP Keeping Schools Running

Cooperation Yields Training

Do school custodians in your district get training in the proper way to prune shrubbery? How about training in team building, conflict resolution, or sick building syndrome?

In the Plainfield, New Jersey, schools, they do. They're the beneficiaries of a custodial training program developed by the Plainfield Safety/Advisory Committee.

This labor-management committee is part of the "Partnership for Reform" program, a joint effort of the Plainfield Education Association and the Plainfield Board of Education.

Copies of the committee's 95-page custodial training manual are available from the NEA ESP program, but supplies are limited. Call 202/822-7131.

For details, contact the Plainfield Education Association, Attn: Executive Secretary Lee Flanagan, 1801 Plainfield Ave., South Plainfield, NJ 07080.

Stop the Pain

Each year, injuries caused by repetitive motion and overexertion account for more than 700,000 serious workplace injuries—30 percent of all disabling injuries.

One type of repetitive strain injury, known as carpal tunnel syndrome, results in workers missing more time from their jobs than any other type of workplace injury.

In schools, support employees who should be concerned about repetitive strain injuries include custodians and maintenance workers, office personnel, bus drivers, and paraeducators working with special education students who require lifting.

The AFL-CIO has assembled information about repetitive strain injuries and promotes the "Stop the Pain!" campaign to protect workers. For details, go to the Web at www.aflcio.org/safety/.

Gophers in the Lab?

Do you think that a "gopher" is:
a) a cute little burrowing animal,
b) someone who has to get the coffee and donuts for the next meeting, or
c) an Internet communication method that links menus of documents together in outline form.

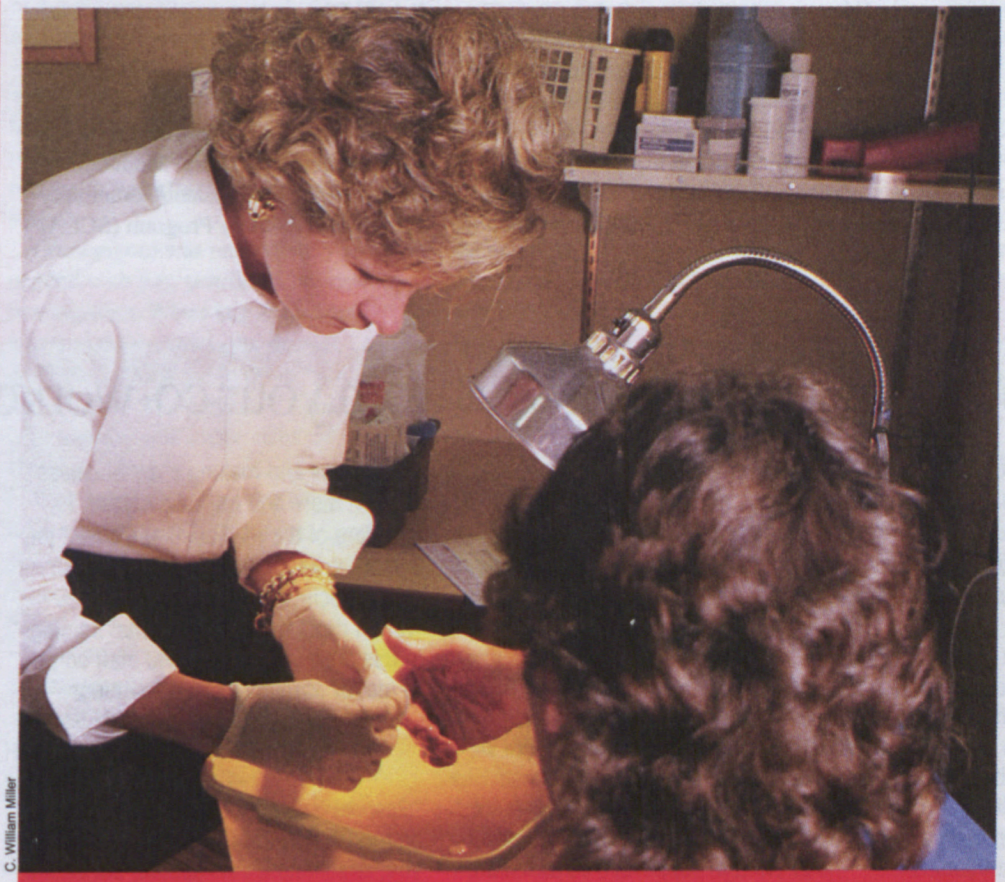
If you aren't sure, you may benefit from the American Association of School Librarians' ICONnect Project. ICONnect offers free workshops, delivered by E-mail, which cover basic and advanced aspects of using the Internet.

The courses are specifically designed to meet the needs of educators. You can sign up on the Web at www.ala.org/ICONN/index.html.

Got Answers?

Do you have a favorite book or magazine? How about a piece of advice that really helped you help a student, or a poem that gets you through the day? Share it with *ESP Extra*, and we'll pass it along.

To send in your ideas, write to ESP Feedback, NEA Publishing, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036, or send an E-mail message to ESPInput@list.nea.org.



© William Miller

If you're a school nurse or health paraprofessional, chances are you don't have much chance to get together with other people doing similar work. If you're interested in avoiding isolation and keeping up-to-date, you may want to join an E-mail discussion list, like the SCHLRN-L list, designed to promote networking among school nursing professionals. To subscribe, go to the SCHLRN-L Web page at www.netspace.org/cgi-bin/lwgate/schlrn-l/ and follow the "Subscribe to SCHLRN-L" link.

Extra Special People

Driver Daune Owens wins "Break the Mold" award.

"Miss Daune is the best school bus driver I've ever encountered," parent Debbie Brungs wrote about Kentucky driver **Daune Owens.**

"We've had the good fortune to have her as our bus driver for the past two years and just didn't want her kindness and dedication to her very important job to go unnoticed."

Because of this tribute, Owens was the first transportation division employee to be honored with Boone County's "Break the Mold" award.

In addition to her kindness toward young passengers, Owens was honored for her work with special ed students. She gets involved in their extracurricular activities when she takes them on field trips.

"It's nice to know that the kids love you, and parents appreciate the job I'm doing," says Owens. "As a parent myself, that's important."

New Jersey teacher assistant **Patricia Beaulieu** has become so vital to her special ed program that a substitute must be hired in her absence.

Beaulieu, who works at the Green Township School, has helped redefine a job that once offered lots of paperwork and little student contact. The result: a new, child-oriented job description for teacher assistants.

Beaulieu has worked with the student council to set up an after-school tutoring program, helped set up an evening study group for seventh and eighth graders, and even prepared instructional materials for selected special needs students.

On top of that, Beaulieu has completed specialized training—on her own time—on working with autistic students. This educator's newfound skills enabled an autistic third grader to remain with his peers in a neighborhood school setting.

Says teacher and former classroom partner Monica Kroger: "Pat has been able to befriend even the most disaffected students and provide direction and guidance in the most caring manner imaginable."

Delaware custodian **Mike Behm** isn't about to let his colleagues be a "forgotten part of the educational team."

An activist in the Lake Forest Education Association, Behm works with his UniServ director to arrange innovative ESP workshops like Health and Personal Safety and Cleaning for a Healthy Environment.

Custodians as environmentalists?

Yup. In Behm's mind, a custodian's job isn't cleaning buildings, but providing the safest, healthiest environment possible for learning—be it through disinfecting classrooms or helping fourth graders prepare a garden bed for a unit on botany.

Behm believes that support staff should know how their jobs impact student learning, no matter what the title. And he preaches "communication, respect, and teamwork" to facilitate teaching and learning.

DSEA

Custodian Mike Behm calls for more teamwork.

"Support staff represent one-third of all school employees, and we're not utilizing them to our best advantage," Behm laments. "That's the real sin: the waste of people who have something important to contribute to learning."

Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountain School District had no idea what it was really getting when it hired **Lamar Thomas** as a monitor.

In just three years, Thomas has created a highly successful arts enrichment program at Pocono Mountain Senior High. The Student/Community Enrichment Activity Program (SCEAP) bridges the cultural gap between this once-rural community and its new residents, many of whom come from the New York metro area.

Through workshops, seminars, and live performances, the program introduces students and Pocono Mountain residents to real, live diversity—be it the tunes of The Platters or the tones of the Pennsylvania Philharmonic.

"When you have as much diversity as we have in our school," says Thomas, "change has to take place—for the betterment, not the detriment."

Thomas also raises money for a scholarship fund, coordinates a Profiles in American History Program, and contributes time to Big Brother/Big Sister and drug awareness programs.

If anybody has bolstered community pride in public education, it's **Vickie Hendrickson,** a bus driver and lunchroom/playground aide in New Jersey's Morris School District.

For four years, Hendrickson chaired the Education Association of Morris's PRIDE Committee, which focuses taxpayers' attention on the contribution of public schools and educators.

During that time, Hendrickson ran two blood drives, put together a PRIDE ad that ran for a year on local movie screens, and coordinated the collection and refurbishment of some 700 stuffed animals for community agencies.

And Hendrickson secured 100 guest readers for local schools during the 1998 Read Across America campaign.

Challenge of the Month

What can you do to get more respect from your co-workers?

"You can't 'get' respect. It's earned through integrity, professional actions, demeanor, and behavior."

—Karen Reynolds, high school secretary, Worthington, Ohio

"The best way to get respect from your co-workers is to first have respect for yourself. If you think you're only a teacher aide or only a custodian, that's how you'll be treated. As long as you act like the professional that you are, the respect will come. How you feel about yourself and your job is the key!"

—Debbie Minnick, paraprofessional, Ithaca, New York

"Respect is always difficult to cultivate in others, but I've found that self-respect and belief in oneself and the importance of one's contribution to the educational environment starts the ball rolling.

"Just the way we project our self image—if it's positive—can't help but gain the respect of our co-workers, the students, and ultimately the community at large."

—Noel Henry, custodian, Southfield, Michigan

"I believe if we have confidence and know that we're good at what we do, we earn respect. I also believe that those we work with return what we give them. In other words, respect earns respect."

—Pat Walton, supportive ed assistant, Albany, Oregon

"Respect yourself first, then everything and everybody else will fall into place."

—Felecia Hampshire, administrative support assistant Green Cove Springs, Florida

"I feel that I've earned the respect of all the employees in our district by doing my job well and making it my business to learn more and improve myself. I take care of the media lab and assist the technology coordinator with the other district technology, including the network. I don't have much formal training in this area, but the certified staff come to me for assistance in many things."

—Teri Turner, Fremont County School District #24, Wyoming

"Respect isn't something you stand up and require from others. It comes to you, unsolicited, unexpected, but after a lot of hard work from you as an individual working within a system that needs all the help it can get.

"If you understand your job, your situation, your surroundings, yourself, then respect will be earned."

—Jackie Aubrey, special ed paraprofessional, Butler, Pennsylvania

"Respect isn't something gained from another, but a gift given to yourself when you're ready to receive it.

"If a certified member shows indifference to an ESP cause, this means only that the certified member needs additional education. We aren't responsible for the acts or views of others. We're only responsible for our own actions and thoughts.

"If you respect yourself, then nothing said or done to you can cause you to stray from what you know to be right."

—Carol Corbitt, bus driver, Coweta County, Georgia

Got an Answer?

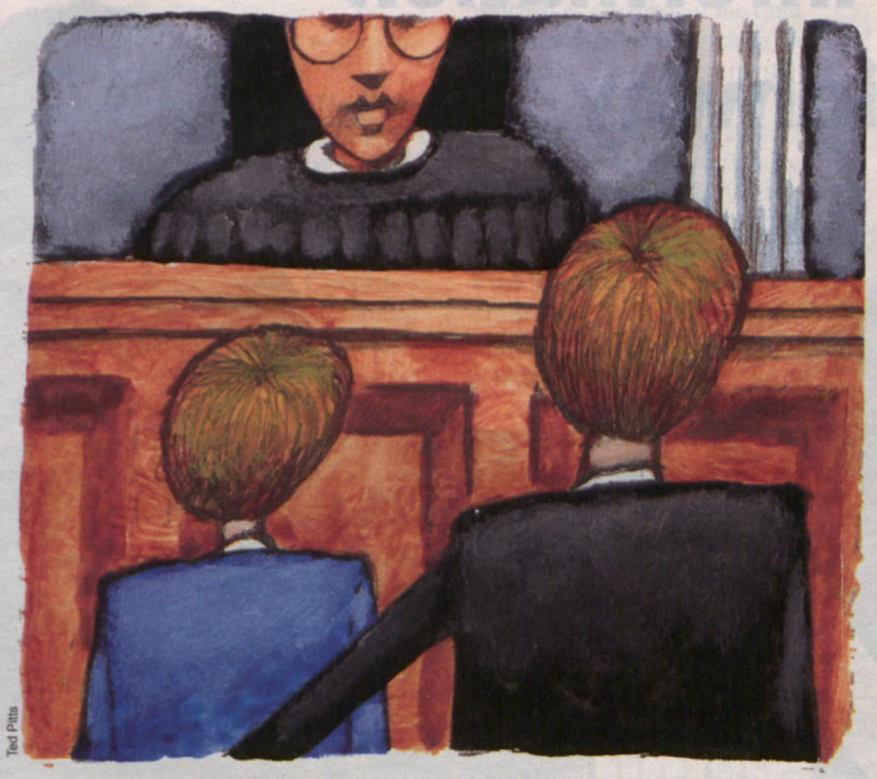
How do you promote your schools in your community?

Send your reply, along with your name, job title, and town or school district to ESPInput@list.nea.org or Fax it to ESP Extra at 202/822-7206.

Rights Watch

Laws That Make Parents Pay

State statutes help make parents legally responsible for some of the havoc their children wreak.


Ted Pitts

When administrators found the bag of marijuana taped to the bottom of her classroom desk, Teresa Robertz remembers thinking, "My career is done."

The first-year Spanish teacher broke down and cried uncontrollably.

Her nightmare began when an anonymous tipster sent letters to school and law enforcement authorities in Carlton, Minnesota claiming that he had seen Robertz hide the pot in her desk and accusing her of being a "dealer."

But Robertz recognized the writer's handwriting. It belonged to Jacob Stewart, one of her students who—it turns out—"hated her" because she was "too strict."

Stewart was arrested and confessed to the frame-up. He was convicted and expelled from school.

But the whole ordeal took quite an emotional toll on Robertz. She moved out of Carlton and took a job as a receptionist because she was "terrified at the prospect of being in front of a classroom again."

Then, in April 1997, with the help of the Minnesota NEA state affiliate, she sued Jacob Stewart.

And she sued his parents.

How could Robertz sue the parents for what Jacob Stewart did to her? Minnesota has enacted a Parental Responsibility law that holds each parent liable up to $1,000 if their minor child "willfully or maliciously" injures a person or damages property.

According to Robertz's attorney, Christina Clark, the Association agreed to fund the case "to let parents and students know that we will not tolerate malicious treatment of teachers.

"Teachers deserve respect," says Clark. "And students and their parents must be held accountable."

Stewart's parents immediately settled the claim against them for the $2,000 maximum. And Jacob later entered into a confidential settlement prior to trial.

After a year off, Robertz returned to full-time teaching in a different Minnesota school district.

In Oregon, 25-year teaching veteran Dan Domenigoni also was the victim of a malicious student plot to ruin his reputation and have him fired.

In November 1994, two students at Milwaukie Junior High School falsely accused Domenigoni of inappropriate touching, and they spread rumors to that effect throughout the school.

Domenigoni was immediately suspended with pay, pending a police investigation. When key witnesses recanted their stories, the district attorney decided not to prosecute, and Domenigoni was reinstated to his classroom after a seven-week absence.

With assistance from the Oregon Education Association, he then sued the students for defamation and sued their parents under the Oregon Parental Liability statute.

Like the Minnesota law, the statute makes parents liable for any tort "intentionally or recklessly" committed by a minor child, but limits damages to $7,500 per parent.

Domenigoni ultimately obtained settlements and judgments against the defendants totaling some $70,000, including $15,000 for the claims against the parents. The students also wrote letters of apology to Domenigoni, who is still teaching.

Every state except New Hampshire has on the books a so-called parental liability or parental responsibility statute. These laws make parents legally responsible for the intentional damage and injuries inflicted by their minor children.

Because these statutes impose "strict liability" on parents—the plaintiff doesn't have to show the parents were "negligent" in any way—they also limit the amount that can be recovered.

These caps vary from state-to-state and average about $2,500. A few states, including Georgia and Maryland, provide a $10,000 limit, while Texas permits recovery up to $15,000.

Presumably, because the amount of recovery is so limited, there are only a handful of court cases where school employees have sued parents under these laws.

But victims of student violence can sue parents and avoid this limit on damages if they can show that it was the parents' negligence that caused their injuries.

The leading case applying this principle involved a Wisconsin teacher who was attacked by a fourth grade special ed student with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. In a landmark 1995 decision, the Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld a $170,000 jury verdict against the parents.

The court said the parents were negligent because they took their son off Dexedrine, the medication that had reduced his violent tendencies, without telling school officials and giving them the opportunity to develop effective behavior modification techniques.

—Michael D. Simpson
NEA Office of General Counsel

False Accusations

Students aren't the only ones who physically or verbally abuse school employees. (See main story.) Parents sometimes get into the act.

And when they do, they can be made to pay.

Possibly the most extreme example involves the bizarre and unconscionable behavior of an Oregon parent named Wilbur Gaston. His target: NEA member and elementary school teacher Hazel Spees.

Gaston began picketing Spees's school with signs falsely accusing her of being a "pedophile," "pornographer," and "child molester."

He also leveled the same false allegations in leaflets he distributed in her neighborhood. The reason? Gaston apparently was disturbed because Spees had been named the foster parent of his child.

Oregon Education Association attorney Barbara Diamond quickly obtained a temporary restraining order prohibiting Gaston from publicly making the false statements.

When Gaston violated the restraining order, Diamond hauled him back into court, where he was held in contempt and fined. She also pursued a civil action against Gaston. Last summer a jury awarded Spees $521,000 for defamation.

Wilbur Gaston has since stopped picketing and leafleting the school and home of Hazel Spees.

In another recent defamation case, Alabama Education Association member Haifa Beshara obtained a $20,000 judgment from parent Sherry Hall for falsely accusing Beshara of hitting her daughter.

Hall swore out a criminal warrant against Beshara and then tipped off the local television station. TV cameras camped out at her school, followed her to the police station, and filmed her leaving after being booked.

Cases of this sort are extremely rare. It's very difficult for teachers to win defamation actions against parents because teachers often are considered "public officials" whose job performance is deemed fair game. Comments critical of a teacher's competence or performance, for example, rarely will support a lawsuit for damages.

But when parents step over the line and make false factual allegations, then the courts may provide a remedy.

—M.D.S.

Meet the Toughest Education Lobbyist On the Information Superhighway

Gail Rasmussen, high school attendance coordinator and National Education Association member

When Congress threatened to pass a budget last year that shortchanged children and public education, Gail went to work — as an ***NEA cyber-lobbyist.*** Gail sent an E-mail to her representative and senators using NEA's online Legislative Action Center on the World Wide Web. Her message: ***Support a budget that invests in public education.*** Congress got Gail's message — and 20,000 more from ***NEA cyber-lobbyists*** nationwide. In the end, lawmakers made the right choice and adopted a 12 percent increase in education funding.

You can help Gail fight for the needs of children and public education. Become an ***NEA cyber-lobbyist.*** You'll receive E-mail alerts about the issues that impact our students and schools and opportunities to lobby Congress and state legislators — right from your desktop computer.

To join us, visit www.nea.org/lac and click "Become a Cyber-Lobbyist."
Or send an E-mail to lobby1999@list.nea.org

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NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Heads Up!

TV Tips

HBO

Dear America

HBO and HBO Family, March, check local listings. "Picture of Freedom" launches a new series of specials that examine history through the eyes of fictional teenage heroes. Based on the book series of the same name, *Dear America*'s first episode tells the story of 12-year-old Clottee, a slave who has taught herself to read and write, but must keep it a secret for fear of being beaten or killed.

Adventures of A.R.K. (Animal Rescue Kids)

Discovery Channel

Discovery Channel, Sundays, 10-10:30 a.m. ET. This program chronicles the adventures of three teen volunteers dedicated to saving animals of all kinds. Based on actual incidents, the program concludes each week with information on how kids can work with animals in their communities.

Mexico

The History Channel, Monday-Thursday, March 8-11, 9-10 p.m. ET. This four-part documentary tells the cultural, political, and social history of Mexico. Dual timelines compare major event's in Mexico's history with events that took place at the same time in the rest of the world. For details, go to www.historychannel.com.

The Magic School Bus

Fox Kids Network, Monday-Friday, check local listings for time. Creepy crawlies are the stars of "You're Bugging Me Week" in March. Kindergarten teachers can receive a free calendar poster with coordinating classroom activities and a "Family Science Fun" page. For a copy, send E-mail to msbposter@saban.com.

Cleopatra's Palace

Discovery Channel, Sunday, March 14, check local listings for time. This documentary goes underwater to showcase the ruins recently discovered beneath Alexandria, Egypt's eastern harbor. Footage includes the legendary lost island of Antirhodos where Cleopatra's palace once stood, two sphinxes, food, jewelry, a shipwreck, and other artifacts that survived in the harbor's sediment for more than 1,600 years.

Maisy

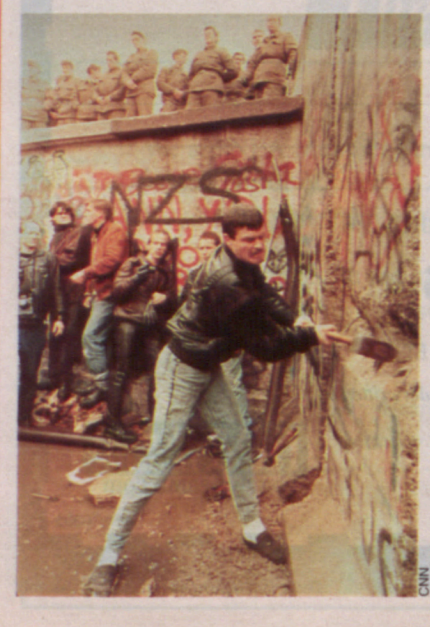
Nickelodeon, Thursday and Friday mornings, check local listings. In this animated, half-hour preschool program based on books by Lucy Cousins, Maisy the Mouse and her animal friends learn about everyday life in five-minute segments. Topics include bedtime, birthdays, trains, farms, hide and seek, snow, and ouch!

The American Experience: Lindbergh

PBS, Monday, March 22, 9-10 p.m. ET, check local listings. Using archival footage, photos, and interviews with family, this biography of Lindbergh, the first pilot to fly solo across the Atlantic, takes a candid look at an American hero whose life was often controversial. For details, go to the Web at www.pbs.org/amex.

Cold War: The Wall Comes Down

CNN, Sunday, March 28, 8-9 p.m. ET.


CNN

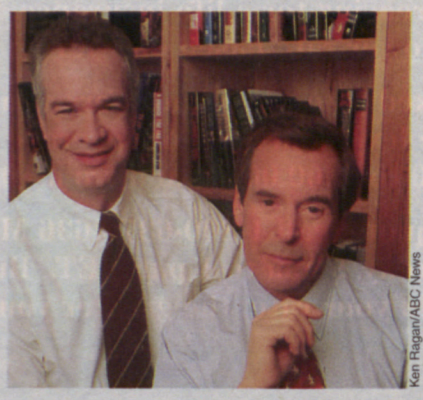
On November 9, 1989, the world watched as a symbol of the Cold War—the Berlin Wall—came down, uniting the city of Berlin for the first time since 1961. CNN's Cold War documentary series continues this month and concludes April 4. For free teaching resources, call 800/344-6219 or go to http://CNN.com/ColdWar.

The Teen Files: Hate

Check local listings the week of March 8 for channel, date, and time. This one-hour special explores how real teens deal with hate and prejudice in their lives. Topics include racism, ethnic bigotry, religious hatred, and sexual discrimination.

ABC News: The Century

ABC, premiering Monday, March 29, 9-11 p.m. ET, and continuing April 1, 3, 5, 8 and 10. This 12-part documentary narrated by Peter Jennings uses more than 500 interviews plus archival film footage to chronicle America's past 100 years.


Ken Ragan/ABC News

Each installment focuses on a theme—for example, how technology, transportation and media unified the nation; the challenges of equal rights and liberty; and America's emergence as a world power. For a teacher's guide, which includes a synopsis and lesson plan for each episode, check the Web at http://thecentury.com.

From Seneca Falls To Ally McBeal

Public Radio International, March, check local listings. This one-hour radio documentary starts with the beginning of the women's rights movement and ends with the teaching of women's history today.

KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., provides these listings. For additional listings and information, check the KIDSNET Web site at www.kidsnet.org.

school stories

Episodes of* School Stories*—produced by NEA and The Learning Channel to provide an insightful look inside America's classrooms—are now on videotape and available from the NEA Professional Library. Here are just a few of the titles in stock:

High-Stakes Testing

Find out how the city of Milwaukee turned failure—only 21 percent of students had passed the high-stakes math test the first time around—into a stirring success, as more than 90 percent of seniors passed the test by the end of the year. Stock #7618-4-00-F, $16.95.

Saving City Schools

Can the nation's worst schools recover? A look at how Chicago schools are making a comeback with the help of parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders. Stock #7616-8-00-F, $16.95.

Building a Sense of Community

After eight successful years in a poor, rural community, principal Steve Scroggs moved to a "Cadillac" of a school in North Carolina. What Scroggs found taught him that money and opportunity don't automatically build a sense of community. Stock #7620-6-00-F, $16.95.

The Drive To Teach

An innovative professional development plan in Savannah, Georgia, helps education support staffers who want to become teachers pursue their education. The program recently won a $100,000 grant to expand its efforts. Stock #7609-5-00-F, $19.95.

Plugging into Technology

With the help of a federal grant, a school in one of America's poorest counties joined the technology revolution. At White River High School in South Dakota, students roam with cameras and computers, and the school has its own Web page. Stock #7613-3-00-F, $19.95.

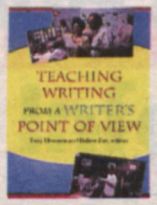
To order any of the above titles, call the NEA Professional Library at 800/229-4200.

Heads Up

Free or Inexpensive

Teaching Writing

In *Teaching Writing from a Writer's Point of View*, students, teachers, and professional writers provide their own



creative writing pieces, plus reflections on writing and teaching writing. For composition and creative writing teachers K-12. $22.95 ($16.95 for NCTE members) plus $2 s&h. Stock #55170-0015. Contact NCTE at 800/369-6283.

Poetry for Kids

Book Poems contains original poems

written for National Children's Book Week celebrations over the past 40 years. A brief biography and a poetry bibliography accompany each poem and each author. $20 plus $3.50 s&h. Contact the Children's Book Council, Inc., Attn: Order Dept., 568 Broadway, Suite 404, New York, NY 10012, 800/999-2160.

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You don't have to pay higher life insurance premiums as you get older. With NEA fixed-rate decreasing term life insurance,* you can save up to 56% by locking in a lower rate based on your current age group.

Along with a fixed rate, the plan offers you flexibility, too. You can customize the level and term of coverage to meet your needs—from $10,000 to $300,000** and from 10 to 30 years.

To get a free quote, call 1-800-637-4636 Monday–Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m (or Saturday, 9 a.m to 1 p.m.) ET. But remember: the sooner you lock in your rate, the greater your savings.

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Slimy Science

Shocking, Slimy, Sticky, Shiny Science Experiments contains 75 experiments for kids ages 8-12 interested in testing their senses of sight, touch, and smell. All the experiments can be done with ordinary household items. $19.95 plus $3.50 s&h. ISBN #0-8069-6295-X. Contact Sterling Publishing Co., Inc. at 800/367-9692.

Healthy Sports

Tired of competitive, bruising sports? *The Cheers and the Tears: A Healthy Alternative to the Dark Side of Youth Sports Today* aims to help parents and athletic directors organize sports that are fun, bring families together, and teach kids valuable lessons. $15 plus s&h. ISBN # 0-7879-4037-2. Contact Jossey-Bass at 800/956-7739. Fax: 415/433-0499. On the Web: www.josseybass.com.

How's the Weather?

The National Audubon Society First Field Guide: Weather explains the cause and effect of weather in an easy-to-read format for grades 4-6. Includes more than 450 color pictures illustrating all the North American weather patterns. $10.95 plus $2.25 s&h. Discounts available with account. ISBN # 0-590-05488-0. Contact Scholastic Inc. at 800/325-6149. Fax: 212/343-7840.

Food Fight

Food Fight: A Guide to Eating Disorders for Preteens and their Parents gives accounts of real kids' struggles with anorexia and bulimia. For kids 8-12, the book lists helpful resources, describes symptoms, causes, and suggests ways to deal with the illnesses. $4.50 plus sales tax and s&h. ISBN # 0-689-81086-5. Contact Simon and Schuster, Attn: Order

Heads Up

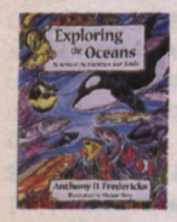
Dept., 200 Old Tappan Rd., Old Tappan, NJ 07675, 800/223-2336 or 800/223-2348.

3D Plants
Use the mirror included in *Eyewitness 3D: Plants* to reveal the natural world of plants as never seen before. For ages 8 and up. $16.95 plus $3.50 s&h. ISBN # 0-7894-3453-9. Contact DK Publishing at 888/342-5357. Fax: 800/774-6733.

Museum Guides
Museum Guides for Kids, two pocket-sized books filled with fun facts and colorful examples, cover American art and impressionism for elementary and middle school kids taking a trip to any art museum. $8.95 each plus $5 minimum s&h. Contact Davis Publications at 800/533-2847. Fax: 508/753-3834.

Math Strategies
For math teachers of students ages 6-12, *Making Problems, Creating Solutions* provides teachers with ways to encourage kids to create problem-solving strategies and then to share and discuss those strategies with peers. $19.50 plus $3.50 s&h. Contact Stenhouse Publishers at 800/988-9812. On the Web: www.stenhouse.com.

Working Parents
Working Parents Can Raise Smart Kids tells time-starved parents how to help improve their child's academic performance in school. $14.95 plus $3 s&h. Contact Parkland Press, 11003 A St. South, Tacoma, WA 98444, 800/461-0070. Fax: 253/536-4944. Send E-mail to prkpress@aol.com.



Oceanography
Exploring the Oceans: Science Activities for Kids contains hands-on activities—from creating homemade waves to simulating erupting undersea volcanoes—that help kids 8-12 understand and appreciate oceanography and the ecosystem. $16.95 plus $4 s&h. Contact Fulcrum Publishing, 350 Indiana St., Suite 350, Golden, CO 80401, 800/992-2908. On the Web: www.fulcrum-books.com.

Have a Heart
Based on a real question-and-answer session between renowned cardiologist J. Willis Hurst and his grandson, *The Heart: The Kids' Question & Answer Book* explains everything kids

8 and up will want to know. $8.95 plus local tax, s&h. Contact McGraw-Hill at 800/338-3987. On the Web: www.pbg.mcgraw-hill.com.

Contest Mania
For students in grades 7-12, *The Ultimate Guide to Student Contests* lists more than 250 ways to compete. $15.95 plus $3.50 s&h. Contact Walker and Company at 800/289-2553.

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Heads Up

Awards

Teacher of the Year
Four finalists for the National Teacher of the Year have been named, and three are NEA members. They are:

- Andrew Baumgartner, a kindergarten teacher at A. Brain Merry Elementary School in Augusta, Georgia.
- Bruce Penniman, an English teacher at Amherst Regional High School in Massachusetts.
- Mary Lynn Peacher, a fourth grade teacher at Jenks East Elementary School in Oklahoma.

President Clinton will announce the winner at the White House in April. The contest is sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers and Scholastic, Inc.

NEA Urban Grants
NEA awarded 25 local Association affiliates $4,000 grants recently to help fund grassroots initiatives that promote a spirit of cooperation among local educators, students, and urban communities.

Here's a brief list of the winners and their plans. For details, go to NEA's Web site, www.nea.org.

- The Birmingham (Alabama) Education Association will co-sponsor a dialogue on public access television.
- The Paradise Valley (Arizona) Education Association will develop and monitor a selection and training process for peer mentors.
- The Denver (Colorado) Classroom Teachers Association and the High Plains News Service will continue radio coverage of innovative education programs.
- The Bridgeport (Connecticut) Education Association's Peer Assistance Committee will continue assisting new teachers with lesson plans, classroom management, and student assessment.
- The Hernando (Florida) Classroom Teachers Association will sponsor one-on-one homework assistance through a telephone hotline.
- The Escambia (Florida) Education Association will sponsor a leadership institute.
- The Boise (Idaho) Education Association will continue efforts to counter negative information about public education in the media.
- The Rockford (Illinois) Education Association will continue to help school employees experiencing high stress and low morale.
- The Schaumburg (Illinois) Education Association and the Schaumburg Education Employees Organization will provide information to new parents about early childhood education.
- The Schaumburg Education Association, Classroom Teachers Council-Palatine, Schaumburg Education Employees Organization, and Education Support Personnel Association will develop a three-year leader training program.
- The Prince George's County (Maryland) Educators Association will sponsor a professional development program for new teachers.
- The Ypsilanti (Michigan) Education Association and the Ypsilanti Support Staff Association will work to improve student achievement through increased parental involvement.
- The Anoka-Hennepin (Minnesota) Education Association will establish a Web page highlighting

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Heads Up

membership services and resources.

■ The Manchester (New Hampshire) Education Association will establish a peer assistance and review program.

■ The Education Association of Passaic (New Jersey) will match all first-year teachers with mentors.

■ The Franklin Township (New Jersey) public schools will produce a set of videos to encourage parents to help children improve their performance on standardized tests.

■ The South Orange Maplewood (New Jersey) Education Association will boost efforts to communicate across cultures.

■ The Pitt County (North Carolina) Association of Educators will help new teachers and candidates for National Board certification with portfolio development.

■ The Erie (Pennsylvania) Education Association will implement a literature and technology-based reading program in an urban fifth grade. The NEA local affiliate will win a second grant to launch a new teacher mentor and support project.

■ The Horry County (South Carolina) Education Association will support its Children's Fund in efforts to help kids who need glasses, medical care, food, and school supplies.

■ The Spartanburg (South Carolina) Association of Educators will revitalize an inner-city community school through creative drama.

■ The Clarksville-Montgomery County (Tennessee) Education Association and the Austin Peay State University Education Association will pair students entering teaching with a mentor for four semesters.

■ The Richmond (Virginia) Education Association will provide mentors for 40 new teachers.

■ The Virginia Beach (Virginia) Education Association will continue to support its NEA Learning Lab.

Cancer Education

Janet Connolly O'Neill, a teacher in Everett, Washington, is the 1998 winner of NEA's Vivian Roy Bowser Cancer Education Award. The award honors individuals doing outstanding cancer education work in their communities.

Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies has named the following two NEA members the 1998 Outstanding Social Studies Teachers of the Year.

■ Michael Yell was named Outstanding Middle Level Teacher of the Year. He teaches seventh grade at Hudson Middle School in Hudson, Wisconsin, and works as a teacher trainer and consultant.

■ Walter Urbanek was named Outstanding Secondary Teacher of the Year. For the last 32 years, Urbanek has taught social studies at Edgar High School in Edgar, Wisconsin.

Geography

NEA member Scott Bell is this year's recipient of the 1998 Grant for the Enhancement of Geographic Literacy. Bell, a teacher in Valencia, California, won $2,500 to pursue the topic, "Perception and Cognition of Remotely Sensed Images."

The grant is cosponsored by the George F. Cram Company and the National Council for the Social Studies.

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Heads Up

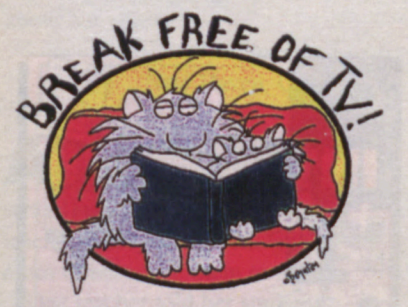
Reach for the Stars

William Ziglar has been named the 1998 winner of the Christa McAuliffe "Reach for the Stars" Award, given by the Fund for the Advancement of Social Studies Education.

Ziglar, a social studies teacher and NEA member in Wayne, Pennsylvania, won for his proposal to establish a social studies honor society, entitled Pi Alpha Epsilon. No national history or social studies honor society now exists.

Events

TV-Turnoff Week



With backing from NEA, TV-Free America will sponsor National TV-Turnoff Week this year from April 22 to 28. Proponents of the special week will focus attention not on the quality of TV programming but on the excessive quantity of television most Americans watch.

To help you and your students participate in the event, TV-Free America has put together kits with activities, posters, and lessons for $10 each plus $3 s&h. For details or to order, contact TV-Free America, 1611 Connecticut Ave., N.W., #3A, Washington, DC 20009, 202/887-0436. Fax: 202/ 518-5560. E-mail: tvfa@essential.org. On the Web: www.tvfa.org.

Grants

School-to-Work

If you subscribe to School to Work News, you may be eligible for a $1,500 grant for materials, personnel, and venture capital for developing projects. Deadline: open.

Contact School to Work News, 623-A Miller Valley Rd., Prescott, AZ 86303. Fax: 520/445-2757. E-mail: stwfound@stwnews.org. On the Web: www.stwnews.org.

Fellowships

Japanese Life

Educators who are interested in observing contemporary Japanese life to enhance their teaching of global perspectives may be interested in a Keizai Koho Center Fellowship.

Winners will travel to Japan from June 20 to July 6. Deadline: March 9. Contact Program Coordinator, Keizai Koho Center Fellowships, 2522 N. 159th Street, Omaha, NE 68116, 402/445-9671. Fax: 402/445-9760.

Contests

Young Writers

To encourage creative writing skills among children, public television's Reading Rainbow is kicking off its fifth annual "Young Writers and Illustrators" contest.

To submit an entry, students K-3 must write a story and draw at least five original color illustrations. Winners can receive computers, printers, VCRs, Reading Rainbow video library and book sets, and more. Check your local public television station for deadlines.

For details and entry forms, contact your local PBS affiliate or call Diane Miller at 800/228-4630.

Books by Kids

Students who write and illustrate books can enter them in the 1999 National Written & Illustrated By. . . Awards Contest sponsored by Landmark Editions. Kids can enter in three age groups—6-9,10-13, and 14-19. The winner in each category will receive a publishing contract and a paid trip to Landmark Editions. Deadline: May 1. For details, call 800/653-2665. On the Web: www.landmarkeditions.com.

Announcements

Minority Test Scores

Alberto Rodriguez, professor of science education at New Mexico State University, piqued *NEA Today* readers' interest (Innovators, January) by comparing the test scores of top minority students to the scores of top white and Asian students.

For more information, contact Rodriguez via E-mail at albertor@nmsu.edu or by phone at 505/646-1067. His mailing address: Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction, New Mexico State University, P.O. Box 30001, Las Cruces, NM 88003.

Junior Achievement

Very few young people will grow up to be professional athletes. So Junior Achievement Inc. has developed a program to show kids that there are other jobs in sports besides "star."

Building Achievement through Sports and Entertainment, which begins in March, will show the business side of sports entertainment to 11-18 year olds across the country.

For details, contact Shawn Huff at 404/257-1932. E-mail: shuff@ja.org. On the Web: www.ja.org.

Correction

The NEA Credit Plan advertisement that appeared in the February issue of NEA Today understated payment amounts for a $25,000 loan.

The estimated payment amounts should be as follows, for the applicable repayment terms:

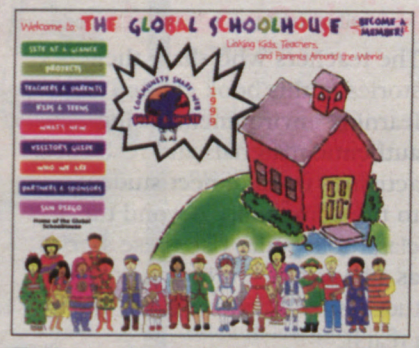
- 24 months—not available.
- 36 months—$855.
- 48 months—$684.
- 60 months—$583.
- 72 months—$516.
- 84 months—$469.

Web Winners

Middle School Reform

Middle Web provides parents and educators with up-to-date, in-depth information on middle school reform. The site includes a resource page for more information on school reform, links to other reform Web sites, and recent news stories about school reform across the country. Visit Middle Web at www.middleweb.com.

Global View



To link to classrooms around the world, go to www.globalschoolnet.org. You'll find resources, contests, activities, projects, links to other sites, and professional development ideas.

Teacher's Resource Center

WNetSchool provides information on how to create a technology-based lesson plan, use the Internet as a classroom tool, design class projects, and more. Teachers can register by logging on at www.wnet.org/wnetschool.

Music Inventions

How is sound made? The Virtual Museum of Music Inventions Web site can tell you. The site also has color pictures of elementary kids' musical instrument inventions, along with a short description of how they were made.On the Web at www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/6553.

Free Stuff

Where can you find information on how to get free food, drinks, stickers, magazines, coupons, E-mail, office supplies, homepages, and more? The Totally Free Stuff Web site at www.freeandfun.com.

Social Studies

Learn about grants and awards sponsored by the National Council for Social Studies and about new and innovative ideas for social studies curriculums at www.ncss.org.

Japanese Culture

Introduce students to the Japanese culture via a Web site with information on Japan's schools, history, daily life, economy, tradition, geography, and more.Go to www.jinjapan.org /kidsweb/index.html.

TeachNet

Sponsored by IMPACT II-The Teachers Network, TeachNet is one of the leading education forums on the web. TeachNet—at www.teachnet.org—has information on grants, top curriculums, and classroom ideas, plus an online forum.

Walk a Mile

Dave Kunst is the first person to have circled the entire landmass of the earth on foot. To learn more about his travels and the places he visited along the way, go to home.earthlink.net/~earthwalker1.

Gold Rush

What was life like during the Gold Rush? Find out by checking a Web site created by the Smithsonian Institution. You'll find it at www.si.edu/postal/gold/gold.html.

Federal Funds

The U.S. Department of Education provides information on grants available to educators on its Web site at www.ed.gov.

Family Problems?

Wholefamily.com is an interactive site that deals comprehensively with family problems using educational entertainment. The site's psychologists, educators, and writers respond to marital, parenting, and teen problems. You'll find it, no surprise, at www.wholefamily.com.

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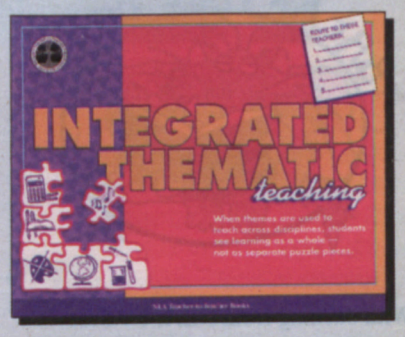
Hurry! Sale ends April 30, 1999.

Technology for Diverse Learners

Six teachers who work with ESL and at-risk students share their stories of how they discovered that computers and video technology succeed where other strategies may fall short. You'll look at how technology can build cultural awareness, boost literacy, and make learning fun for all kids.

96 pp., 1997, Stock #2908-9-00-DS
Non-members ~~$12.95~~ $8.00, NEA Members ~~$9.95~~ $5.00

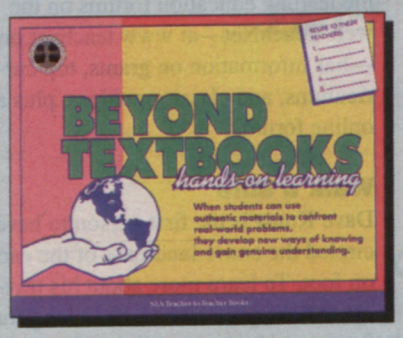
Integrated Thematic Teaching



See how teachers successfully interweave disciplines into a tapestry that makes the curriculum come alive. You'll discover how monthly and year-long themes can develop critical thinking skills and enhance student learning.

96 pp., 1996, Stock #2909-7-00-DS
Non-members ~~$12.95~~ $8.00, NEA Members ~~$9.95~~ $5.00

Beyond Textbooks: Hands-On Learning



The teachers who share their stories in this book created lively learning environments using authentic materials and real-world activities that connect students to the community beyond the classroom walls. Use these stories as a basis for developing your own innovative projects that give your students new ways to learn and a genuine understanding of what you teach.

96 pp., 1995, Stock #2906-2-00-DS
Non-members ~~$12.95~~ $8.00, NEA Members ~~$9.95~~ $5.00

School-Based Change

"The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not found, but made." For everyone involved in "pathmaking," here's a book of authentic stories from teachers who have been there. You'll discover 7 ideas for smoothly facilitating change in your school. You'll be inspired to clip and post the 11 maxims of the change process. You'll also learn new skills and strategies, including how to cope with faculty and community resistance, overcome time constraints, and the key steps to starting your own pathmaking inquiry groups.

96 pp., 1994, Stock #2905-4-00-DS
Non-members ~~$12.95~~ $8.00, NEA Members ~~$9.95~~ $5.00

Building Parent Partnerships

This book helps you find just the right building blocks for greater parent involvement in your school. You'll explore new ways to accommodate parents' busy schedules and to address the changes in the nature of today's families. You'll learn how to plan effective parent conferences, newsletters, and much more.

96 pp., 1996, Stock #2911-9-00-DS
Non-members ~~$12.95~~ $8.00, NEA Members ~~$9.95~~ $5.00

Time Strategies: Block Scheduling and Beyond

Discover new ways to get more out of each day using methods such as the Wasson Block Plan, release days, and team teaching. After you've been "doing" school-based change for a while, you'll really appreciate the strategies offered in this book.

96 pp., 1994, Stock #2902-X-00-DS
Non-members ~~$12.95~~ $8.00, NEA Members ~~$9.95~~ $5.00

Shipping & handling charges will be added to all orders.

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In the Light Lane

It's a Family Affair

My students were required to write a family heritage paper. I asked the class to generate a list of questions for their parents. I suggested asking "What are you most proud of in your life?" and "What are your fears?"

One of my students raised her hand and said, "Miss Leavitt, I just know my mom is not going to want to talk about her affairs!"

Tamara Leavitt
New Haven, Connecticut

A few years ago, I was the new music teacher at an elementary school. On the first day of class, teachers brought their students to my room to introduce them to me.

One teacher told her students, "Boys and girls, this is Mrs. Combs, your music teacher. You can remember her name by thinking of what you do to your hair every morning."

The next time her class came to music, a cute, blond-haired boy popped up from his seat and exclaimed, "Good morning, Mrs. Brush!"

Lana S. Combs
Morehead, Kentucky

Every now and then, I like to quiz my high school class about historical dates. On December 7, I asked my students what historical significance that date held. After a long pause, one of my students finally yelled out, "Oh, I know, it's Arbor Day."

Confused, I said, "Arbor Day? That's not until spring."

Another student answered that December 7, 1941 was the day Japan had attacked the Hawaiian islands.

The first student defended her answer, saying, "Yeah, that's when they sank all the ships in the arbor!"

Jim Dirmaier
Bennington, Vermont

Our third grade class was writing letters. I explained the different parts of a letter, including the greeting and salutation. One child immediately raised her hand after I explained how to write the greeting.

"How do you spell Ms. Vuchichevich's first name?" she asked.

As I paused a moment, thinking of a reply about how inappropriate it was to use a teacher's first name, the little girl continued, "Is it M-R-S or M-I-S-S?

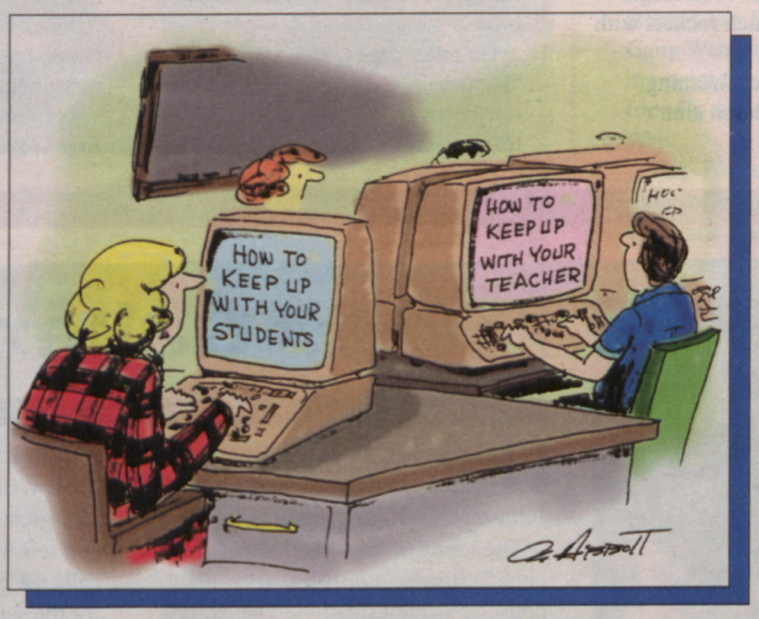
Janet Key
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

One day, during my eighth grade history class, we were discussing how much time it took Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence.

I said that Jefferson finished the Declaration of Independence on what is now Independence Day.

One student raised her hand and asked, "How did he know that he was going to finish it in time for the 4th of July?"

Tanya Genke
Appleton, Wisconsin



At the end of class, I began an informal chat with a young man about the uniqueness of being a twin.

"So tell me, Matt, do you have ESP with your brother?" I asked nonchalantly.

"Why no, Mrs. Brewer," he replied. "We don't get cable where we live."

Jean Brewer
Hiram, Ohio

Several years ago, the school I taught at in Teaneck, New Jersey, hosted a multicultural fair. The highlight of the fair was an event in the school gymnasium, where a parade of adults and children dressed in authentic clothing representing their family's heritage.

Students took the microphone and introduced themselves and the culture they were representing.

One student said, "My name is Suzanne, and I'm from France."

At the very end of the line was a tiny girl, dressed in an exquisitely embroidered silk robe depicting her Chinese heritage. She stood with a puzzled look on her face as people introduced themselves.

When the microphone was finally passed to her, she said loudly, "My name is Robin, and I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm from Teaneck!"

Liz Goodman
Las Vegas, Nevada

Most of my kindergarten children speak Spanish and know a limited amount of English when they enter school.

One day during our ocean unit, a kindergartner named Gladys was putting together a large floor puzzle with pictures of fish and whales.

I pointed to the whale and said, "This is called a whale."

She looked up at me with a big grin and said, "I know what it is in Spanish."

I'm always interested in learning new vocabulary, so I asked, "What do you call it?"

She said triumphantly, "Free Willy!"

Brenda Galloway
Los Angeles, California

A first grader came into school Monday morning just thrilled. Over the weekend, her big sister had taught her cursive writing. She went right to work to show me what she had learned.

A few moments later, she was back, paper in one hand, the other hand over her heart. She exclaimed proudly, "I wrote my name in courage!"

I thought to myself, "...and don't we all!"

Sharon Santillo
Maynard, Massachusetts

Lunchtime Lunacy

I had my new first grade class worked up about my favorite dish in the cafeteria—turkey and gravy. I told the students who lined up to buy the meal, I would call them my little turkeys.

One boy looked up at me and said, "Does that mean you are the big turkey?"

Deanna Gaeta
Walnut, CA

In our lunchroom, students must raise their hands and ask permission to scrape their trays when finished eating.

One day a new kindergartner raised her hand. I was confident she would make no mistakes after listening to several older children ask to scrape their trays. She motioned for me to bend down and whispered in my ear, "May I escape?"

Chris Moffatt
Green River, Wyoming

Every morning our attendance clerk takes staff orders for lunch. One morning, our custodian phoned in and said, "Order me a sub, please."

When lunchtime came, a submarine sandwich arrived marked for him. But no one had set up the cafeteria. He really needed a *substitute*, not a sub sandwich!

Ann Cunningham
Lincoln, California

My students enjoy learning Spanish words. One boy asked me how to say "you are pretty" in Spanish. I told him, "Usted es bonita." Later, his classroom teacher said he told her upon entering the classroom, "Usted es un burrito."

Sharon Lumadue
Standardsville, Virginia

Got Laughs?

■ Have a funny school story, anecdote, or vignette you'd like to share with other NEA members? You can send contributions to "In the Light Lane," *NEA Today*, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Fax: 202/822-7206. Send E-mail to neatoday@nea.org.

■ Want a classroom chuckle delivered to your E-mail box once a week? Subscribe to the new "In the Light Lane" mailing list. Just send an E-mail to **join-lightlane@list.nea.org** (no subject or message needed).

People

Rachelle Omenson

Counting **Critters**

Danita Guarino's first graders don't use plastic beads to practice counting. The students are more likely to count the legs on live Madagascar millipedes.

Guarino's classroom at Walter C. Black School in Hightstown, New Jersey, is crawling with critters: hissing cockroaches, crayfish, meal worms, Monarch butterflies, tadpoles and frogs. The math/science content specialist uses the critters for hands-on lessons in math, science, and reading.

Students are given a tarantula and asked to keep a daily journal about the multi-legged pet as part of a writing lesson. The class breeds butterflies as part of a science experiment and weighs bugs to learn measurements.

"Environment plays a very big role in how kids view the world, Guarino explains. "The classroom has to be an inviting place or they get turned off right away," she explains.

Guarino also uses a hands-on approach to breathe life into inanimate objects. Her students work with pulleys, construct balance beams to weigh insects, and race paper airplanes. After a nine-month stint at NASA as an Einstein Fellow, Guarino even taught her students how to launch rockets with film canisters.

"Unless something has meaning," she points out, "the children aren't going to grasp it."

Move Over **Superman!**

The super heroes in Frank Jones's comic books don't fight aliens and other space creatures. They're more likely to face off against bullies and gang leaders.

Jones, a North Carolina teacher, has created *Do Right Press!* comic books to help elementary school kids make good decisions about their lives.

"I thought since comics were a medium usually used for entertainment, they could also be used to teach," says Jones, who teaches computer-aided design at Swansboro High School in Onslow County.

The books help kids learn about drugs, gangs, violence, and guns. They're chock full of advice for kids on "how to think, then do right."

In one issue, characters admonish children about the difference between toy guns and real guns. The lesson for readers: "It's not cool to bring a gun to school."

On other pages, kids are asked, "How do you do right when someone keeps teasing you after the teacher has told them to stop?" The book offers advice on handling these and other sticky situations.

Jones says his family is the inspiration behind the comic books.

"My son, Dante, plays a crucial role in helping me determine what type of characters and topics will be of interest to kids his age," he explains.

Jones creates the artwork and story lines for the books. He collaborates with his wife and others in coming up with topics to explore.

Do Right Press!, published every two months, is distributed to schools, community programs, and nonprofit organizations. The publishing venture takes up a lot of time in Jones's busy schedule.

"I leave school around 2:30 p.m. and come to the office where I work on the books until around 11 p.m.," he says. "It's not unusual to find me up at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, even though I have to get up at 5 o'clock and get ready for school."

Jones is currently working on two comic books to help teenage children make better decision about their lives.

For more information on Jones' *Do Right Press!*, call 910/743-2498.

NCAE

Beth Kaplan

A Glorious **Gallery**

Hanging student artwork on bulletin boards is a thing of the past at Johnson City High School.

The lobby of the school, located outside Binghamton, New York, now houses a spacious gallery. The gallery displays two- and three-dimensional artwork by students, including paintings and sculptures.

Minnie Higginson, the school's art teacher, is the brainchild behind the gallery.

"We used to use mobile bulletin boards, but students kept asking for a safe place to display their artwork," says Higginson.

The permanent glass structure has delivered all that it promised—a safe and prominent place to display student artwork.

Now, Higginson says, students take greater pride in their artwork and relish the feedback they get. She calls the gallery a "shot in the arm" for the school's art program.

"Before, some thought art was a dumping ground for kids who could not do anything else," she says. "Now there's a higher regard for the arts among the school's faculty."

When school officials could not come up with the money to fund the gallery, Higginson and students raised $10,000 from the community to build the 5-foot by 30-foot structure.

Now community members are among the biggest supporters of the gallery.

When the gallery was between shows recently, a concerned parent called Higginson to ask why it was empty. Explains Higginson: "Everybody always watches to see what's going up."

Filling the **Black Hole**

What do you get when you cross *The Goonies* with *The Magic School Bus?* Fourth grade teacher Stephen Kramer's *The Black Hole Gang*.

The book series combines adventure and humor to educate students about science.

"Writing something accessible and interesting to a wide range of kids was my goal," says Kramer, who teaches at Hockinson Intermediate School, in Brush Prairie, Washington.

The Black Hole Gang is made up of Matt, Wei Ling, Rosa, A.J., and a dog named Newton. The first book in the series, *The Dark Zone* (McGraw-Hill, 1998), follows the gang on an exploration deep into the heart of a Missouri cave.

The Black Hole Gang is also an adventure in cyberspace. To help steer elementary students to good science Web sites, Kramer he created The Black Hole Gang Web site, a starting point for kid-friendly science on the Web.

The Web site has a series of science sleuth questions teachers can use to motivate students to read and explore links to other science Web sites. They also learn about topics ranging from bats and rainforests to simple machines and astronomy.

Each link on the site has been chosen because of its readability, design, and interest for intermediate grade students, Kramer says.

"Kids have a tendency to skim around on the surface of Web sites," Kramer says. "They glance at the pictures and jump from one page to another without really stopping to read and absorb the information. Teachers need to provide some kind of task whenever they take their class onto the Web so that the students have a sense of purpose."

Kramer's books have received rave reviews and nominations for a Young Reader award.

The Web site has received recognition from the Eisenhower Clearinghouse for Math and Science. You can visit Kramer's Web site at www.blackholegang.com.

Damian Mullinix

You've Got **Class**

Each Tuesday night at 9 p.m., more than a dozen students sign onto America Online and pull up a chair in the cyber classroom of Marie Thomas.

Thomas teaches a class called "Children on the Internet" as part of AOL's online course program.

"The class is designed to help children safely navigate the Internet and use this new technology with dignity and respect," says Thomas. The course, open to adults and children, also teaches about Internet research as well.

Thomas, who retired in 1997 from Baker Elementary School in Milford, Michigan, says practicing Internet safety means, for starters, children shouldn't give out personal information when online.

"You never know who's on the other side," she explains.

Jay Conner

Thomas shows students how to make the best use of their time on the Internet. "The Internet can be used for fun, to make worldwide connections with other students, and for research" she says.

Money

Getting Started

What's the first step in buying a home?

Spruce up your credit rating. That should be done well in advance of calling a real estate agent or going on a search for your first home.

Mortgage lenders today look at your credit score to decide whether to lend you money and also to determine what interest rate they will offer you.

There is a good reason for that. Primary lenders, like the bank you visit to borrow money, resell your mortgage and all the other mortgage loans they make.

This secondary mortgage market has strict rules for the mortgages it will buy. For example, the Federal National Mortgage Association, or Fannie Mae, which buys mortgages from lenders and repackages them for investors, will only buy mortgages if the borrower has "A" quality credit.

Under federal law, you have the right to see your credit report and to fix any errors on it. And there can be a lot of errors in these reports.

The best thing to do is make sure your credit record is clean by obtaining a copy of your credit report from each of the three major credit reporting agencies:

- TRW National Consumer Relations Center, P.O. Box 2350, Chatsworth, CA 91313, 800/685-1122. First copy free.
- Equifax Credit Info Services, P.O. Box 740241, Atlanta, GA 30374, 800/685-1111. $8 per copy.
- Trans Union Corp., P.O. Box 390, Springfield, PA 19064, 800/851-2674. $8 per copy.

Did You Know?

. . . that you can access homebuying information on the NEA Member Benefits Web Site?
Find out what "PITI" means by accessing the mortgage glossary. The site also lists the top five emotional mistakes first-time buyers make and gives details about the NEA Home Financing Program. Use the site for tips on how to find a good mortgage rate, and to calculate whether a 15- or 30-year mortgage is a better deal for you.

Sign on at www.neamb.com today and check out the Web site designed with you in mind.

Can You Afford . . .?

A Home of Your Own

Buying a home is the biggest financial decision most of us will ever make.

There's good news for young Americans thinking of buying a home in 1999. Thanks to the Internet, information on home buying is available right at your fingertips.

Internet sites offer calculators to help you compare the cost of buying versus renting or to figure out how much home you can afford.

If you are contemplating buying a home, your first step might be to compare the cost of buying versus renting. You can afford to pay more on a mortgage than you can pay for rent because the interest on the mortgage is tax deductible.

For example, for a taxpayer in the 31 percent tax bracket, a $1,500 monthly mortgage payment is comparable to $1,000 renter's fee. There's a handy calculator in the real estate section at www.moneycentral.com that makes the task of comparing renting versus buying much easier.

A general rule of thumb is that if you expect to stay in a new house for seven years, you'll be better off buying. That's because there are many up-front costs associated with buying a home. If you sell your home again in a year or two, you won't be able to recover those costs.

What can you afford to pay for your first home? Banks and other lenders have very strict lending rules. The amount you pay for principal and interest can't represent more than 28 percent of your gross take-home pay, or the amount on your paycheck before any taxes or other deductions are taken out. So let's say you earn $36,000 a year or $3,000 a month. Twenty-eight percent of $3,000 is $840.

There is a second part to this equation. The principal and interest plus insurance and real estate taxes—called PITI—and any other long-term debts you have, such as school loans and car payments, can't exceed 36 percent of your gross pay, or $1,080 in our example. Some lenders offer expanded ratios, however.

You must also decide what you can afford to pay as a down payment. You can find lenders who will loan you up to 95 percent or even 97 percent of the price of your home. But, if you borrow more than 80 percent, you'll have to buy private mortgage insurance, or PMI, which is added to the cost of your monthly mortgage payment.

The best way to figure out how much house you can afford is to use the calculators available on the Internet at www.hsh.com, the Web site of HSH Associates, a leading provider of data on the mortgage market.

HSH also offers a 56-page booklet, *How to Shop for a Mortgage*, containing charts and tables to help you decide what kind of mortgage suits you best. Also included: a survey of lending institutions in your area and their current mortgage rates. The booklet costs $23 and is available by calling 1-800-UPDATES.

How Much Is Too Much?

Don't get in over your head with a mortgage you can't afford. Use this worksheet to figure out how large a mortgage payment you might qualify for.

Estimated monthly real estate tax and homeowners insurance payments _____

Monthly installment payments for debts that will take 10 months or more to pay _____

1. Multiply monthly gross income by 28 percent. _____

   Subtract monthly real estate tax and homeowners insurance. _____

   The result is Amount A _____

2. Multiply monthly gross income by 36 percent. _____

   Subtract monthly real estate tax, homeowners insurance, and monthly installment payments. _____

   The result is Amount B. _____

Source: HSH Associates

The lesser of these two amounts represents the mortgage payment you should qualify for.

Resources

Questions such as "Do I have enough for a downpayment?" or "How much house can I reasonably afford?" are commonly asked by first-time home buyers. Now NEA Member Benefits has a program that can help you take the hassle out of home buying. The NEA Home Financing Program® offers a low down payment option and a special program for first-time home buyers.

Get a loan commitment before you start house hunting and save time and frustration in the process. Experienced loan counselors will review with you the wide range of home financing options available and help you determine which one is right for you. When you're ready, you can apply for your mortgage right over the phone by calling the NEA Mortgage QuickLine®.

Call 800/NEA-4-YOU (800/632-4968) whenever convenient for you. Mortgage loan counselors are available Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - midnight, ET.

Tapping Your Home's Equity

If home improvements are in your future, consider a home equity loan.

Who:
NEA member James Stannard, 46, physical education teacher at Portland Middle School in Portland, Connecticut

Financial Goal:
To obtain financing for home improvements

Game Plan:
Four years ago, Stannard, who resides in Haddam, Connecticut, with his wife and children, purchased an 1834 colonial home.

"Last spring we wanted to complete some restoration work on the house," Stannard says. "We also wanted to convert an old barn on the property into a garage and install an in-ground pool. We financed a lot of the work with a home equity loan."

"We didn't have a lot of equity built up in the house, and we found that most banks were only willing to lend up to 80 percent of the equity we'd accrued," he notes.

Stannard obtained the loan through the NEA Member Benefits' Home Financing Program.

"The NEA Member Benefits program was able to get us a home equity loan for up to 90 percent. And because the interest on the loan is tax deductible, we'll pay less in federal income tax this year than we did last year," Stannard notes.

The Experts Say:
If you intend to retire in your current home, now might be the time to make some small renovations that will make your home more comfortable.

Home equity loans can be used for these common home improvements: installing wall-to-wall carpeting, kitchen cabinets, sun rooms, extra bedrooms, or bathrooms.

The popularity of home equity loans has skyrocketed since 1986, when Congress phased out tax deductions for most consumer loans, with the notable exception of home equity loans.

Most banks offer both home equity loans and home equity lines of credit. With a home equity loan, you get all the money at once—in a lump sum—and repay it over five to 20 years. The interest rate is typically fixed, meaning it stays the same throughout the life of the loan.

A home equity loan may be a good source of money to tap to pay for home improvements.

Home equity lines of credit are different. They're similar to credit cards—in that you get a set credit line on which to draw over time. Each month you can make the minimum payment or more if you wish. Lines of credit generally have variable interest rates that can change on a monthly or annual basis.

The interest you pay on a home equity loan or line of credit up to $100,000 is deductible, meaning you can subtract it from your taxable income when you prepare your tax return.

The interest on amounts above $100,000 is not deductible, with one exception: If you use the money for home improvements, you can deduct the interest on a loan of up to $1 million.

Here are some guidelines on using a home equity loan or line of credit:

- Don't open a larger credit line than you really need. You pay closing costs on the entire line, even though you plan to borrow only a portion of the money. Also, on your credit report, the entire line is treated as an outstanding loan, even if you haven't borrowed against it.
- Don't borrow too much. The bank will usually lend as much as 70 to 100 percent of the value of your house, minus the amount remaining on your first mortgage. If your income seems too low to carry that much debt, the bank will lend less.
- Borrow at a variable interest rate. Variable loans generally are cheaper than fixed-rate loans in the long run.
- Read the fine print in the loan agreement.
- Repay early. Don't let a home improvement loan hang around for more than seven years.

The NEA Home Financing Program® offers home equity loans as well as new mortgages and refinances. For more information, contact NEA Member Benefits at 800/637-4636.

Resources

You've just about paid off the mortgage on your home, and you're toying with the idea of retiring in a few years. What a great time to think about some of the home improvements you've been putting off for years. Whether you want to update your kitchen, redo your bath, or add on that extra room, a home equity loan or line of credit may be the answer. As an NEA member, you can take advantage of the NEA Home Financing Program and apply for a loan over the phone. This low-cost loan or line of credit allows you to access the equity you've built up over the years you've owned your home.

Contact your home equity loan counselor, toll free, at 800/NEA-4-YOU (800/632-4968).

Continuing On

I'd like to retire in my current home, but I can't afford to. Is there any way, short of selling, that I can use the equity in my house to avoid moving?

A reverse mortgage is one solution to this dilemma.

A reverse mortgage is basically a home equity loan for homeowners with a mortgage-free home. Here's how it works: You take out a loan at a certain rate. In return you receive a monthly check for a specified amount, say $500.

Depending on the terms of the mortgage, you'll receive that monthly check for as long as you live in your home, or for a specified number of years.

The money you receive is tax-free because it's considered a loan, not income. And it won't affect your eligibility for Social Security and other federal programs. At the term's end, or when you move or die, the loan must be repaid to the lender, usually by selling your home.

In return for your monthly check, you give the lender part or all of the value of your home, including a percentage of the price appreciation that occurs during the term of the mortgage.

But beware: Reverse mortgages aren't for everyone, and some types can be downright dangerous.

The National Center for Home Equity Conversion (NCHEC) is an independent, nonprofit organization that educates consumers about reverse mortgages. For more information, visit the NCHEC's Web site at www.reverse.org.

Retiring Soon?

Thinking about retirement? Don't forget that membership in NEA-Retired offers you a continuation of Association activism, benefits tailored to your needs as a retiree, plus workshops, conferences, and volunteer opportunities.

You'll also receive *NEA Retired* magazine, a bimonthly publication covering Association news and the latest on Social Security, pension, and health issues—as well as feature articles on NEA-Retired members around the country.

Join now as a pre-retired member. Contact NEA-Retired, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. On the Web at www.nea.org/retired.

Your Dues Dollars

A Report from NEA Secretary-Treasurer Dennis Van Roekel

As NEA Secretary-Treasurer, I am pleased to report to you figures excerpted from NEA's audited statements for the fiscal and membership year ended August 31, 1998. Once again NEA experienced a positive year in 1997-98!

Not only did we increase membership by adding 69,706 new members to our organization, but we also added $1.3 million to our total Net Assets as a result of net revenues exceeding expenses. This increase together with the 44,235 new members added to our organization last year adds strength to our already fiscally sound organization and enables us to build confidence in public education and to advocate for our member's needs. Each of you should be proud of your contribution in making the NEA strong and responsive to the students we serve and the people who spend their lives in public education.

The auditor's opinion letter stated that their work was performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. It was a 'clean opinion' issued without any qualifying comments. An unqualified opinion is the best kind of opinion letter to receive.

The Statements of Financial Position presented the Association's assets, liabilities and net assets as of August 31, 1998. One important indicator of an organization's financial strength is its Current Ratio. This ratio is determined by comparing Current Assets (what we own) with Current Liabilities (what we owe). This ratio should be at least 2:1, that is $2 of current assets for each $1 of current liabilities. NEA exceeds this criterion with a Current Ratio of 2.03:1 for fiscal year 1998. Another indicator of financial strength is the Net Assets (the difference between total assets and total liabilities). Net Assets should be a positive balance and sufficient not only to stabilize an organization in troubled times, but also to serve as a source of funds for special projects, future growth, and other fiscal demands as deemed appropriate. NEA's combined Net Asset Balance is over $46.5 million, a level at which we can take both pride and comfort.

The General Operating Fund Statement of Activity and Changes in Net Assets reflects total Revenue and Expenses by Strategic Objective. Note that the increase in revenue generated from a substantial increase in membership allowed for additional expenditures in the strategic objectives as well providing an additional $636,088 in net assets.

Membership growth, fiscal stability and strength, and sound allocation of NEA's resources combined to make 1997-98 an outstanding year for the National Education Association.

Note: A complete copy of the NEA audit report is available upon request.

National Education Association of the United States

Statements of Financial Position By Fund at August 31, 1998
With Comparative totals as of August 31, 1997

	General Operating Fund	Special Purpose Funds	Capital Improvement Fund	1998 Total Funds	1997 Total Funds
Current Assets	$42,423,045	$ 8,167,780	$ —	$ 50,590,825	$ 53,980,270
Long-term Assets	29,551,999	13,170,572	59,390,581	102,113,152	97,162,020
Total Assets	$71,975,044	$21,338,352	$59,390,581	$152,703,977	$151,142,290
Current Liabilities	$19,214,025	$ 4,141,961	$ 1,619,925	$ 24,975,911	$ 25,131,189
Long-term Liabilities	30,356,984	8,938,099	41,837,197	81,132,280	80,747,216
Total Liabilities	49,571,009	13,080,060	43,457,122	106,108,191	105,878,405
Unrestricted Net Assets	22,404,035	8,258,292	15,933,459	46,595,786	45,263,885
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	$71,975,044	$21,338,352	$59,390,581	$152,703,977	$151,142,290

National Education Association of the United States

General Operating Fund Statement of Activity and Changes in Net Assets Year Ended August 31, 1998

	Budget (Unaudited)	Actual
Total Revenue	$200,687,500	$206,702,253
Expenses by Objective:		
Build broad-based support for a quality public education system	22,026,321	24,143,196
Enhance affiliate and member capacity in generating community partnerships that promote excellence in public schools	23,976,671	26,380,316
Support individual and collective initiatives to create quality teaching and learning for all students	18,943,107	18,034,162
Essential organizational systems that are the foundation for all association activities which expand the rights and further the interests of educational employees and advocate human, civil and economic rights for all	135,703,401	137,508,491
Total Expenses	200,649,500	206,066,165
Changes in Net Assets	$ 38,000	636,088
Unrestricted Net Assets, Beginning of Year		21,767,947
Unrestricted Net Assets, End of Year		$ 22,404,035

The following is a breakdown of how NEA dues dollars are allocated to support and represent its members and affiliates in their efforts to achieve the mission of the NEA. $112.00 NEA Dues (Active member, professionally employed).

$2.09 Advocate for qualified teachers in every classroom

$2.24 Provide strategies for school improvement

$.32 Improve ESP professional development, evaluation and compensation systems

$.76 Advocate for safe and orderly schools and facilities for students and staff

$1.14 Promote school construction and modernization

$2.61 Establish new partnerships with diverse groups and businesses

$6.76 Build bipartisan support for public education

$3.56 Establish NEA's public image as an advocate for quality public schools

$.82 Recruit and retain members in all categories

$41.89 Support the UniServ Staffing Program

$2.57 Improve students' readiness and motivation to learn and achieve

$1.37 Provide contingency funding for emergencies at national, state and local levels

$1.00 Provide funding for growth of the NFIE Endowment Fund

$7.96 Implement a governance process that fosters member participation and democratic decision-making

$8.08 Produce communications that provide a common understanding of Association priorities

$6.58 Support pro-public education coalition and commit to affirmative action, diversity and member rights

$21.05 Expand advocacy programs for members, including legal protection

$1.20 Address anti-public education initiatives

My Turn

Helping Kids Beat the Odds

Kids 'act out' when their lives spin out of control. It's a counselor's job to get them back on track.

By Cynthia Kowa Basler

Nathan isn't passing any of his classes. He needs glasses and Ritalin, neither of which his parents can afford. They're homeless.

Jeff started out well in sixth grade, after two years in fifth, but his grades began to fall almost instantly. His parents are going through a divorce, and he thinks it's his fault.

Margaret's doing well in school, but she's sad most of the time. A foster child, she's furious with her birth mother for continuing to have children she can't take care of.

Susan gets teased constantly about her tall, thin frame and her buck teeth. A young fifth grader, she hits back—literally.

Kevin turned in his father for sexually abusing his sister. Larry's been arrested for shoplifting twice in just a few weeks. Melanie sees no purpose in living, let along doing classwork. And at least half a dozen students are struggling because one parent is in jail.

I know these kids well. I'm a school counselor, caring for 525 middle school students in Dixon, Illinois, a town of 16,000 about 100 miles west of Chicago.

Their problems—financial, social, emotional, and academic—are not unique to Dixon, hometown of Ronald Reagan. Chances are, you'll find them in most middle class towns and most middle schools throughout the country.

It's my job to try to help each and every one of these kids overcome feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness and get back on the track toward academic success.

It's not easy, and it's not instant. But these kids will succeed if we, as educators, keep a few important things in mind.

- Most troubled adolescents think they're in control and act like they're in control. But they're really just "acting out" in many different ways—some obvious, some not.

It's up to adults to remember it's an act. Most of these kids truly lack a feeling of control over their own lives.

Too many young people don't realize that feelings belong to them, that they have control over their own feelings and actions, and that they can decide to do whatever they want to do.

If kids feel angry, that's okay, but they have to realize that no one is making them feel angry. They have control over how they feel. It's totally up to them.

As I tell all the kids in my groups, Eleanor Roosevelt once said: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

When kids realize they're in control of themselves and their feelings—not parents, not teachers, not principals—a light bulb goes on, and they're able to make better choices.

- When troubled adolescents can trust an adult in their lives—a counselor, teacher, principal, bus driver, relative, or neighbor—anything's possible.

I've found lots of simple, easy ways to build that trust. Saying hello, flashing a smile, asking "How was your night last night?"—all help more than you might think. Spending time in the halls, eating in the cafeteria, and joining in games on the playground work, too.

When kids realize that you're not going to put them down, you're going to keep their confidences, and you're going to trust them, they'll trust you.

- For school-based counseling to succeed, everyone involved has to make it a top priority. That means that teachers have to release kids for counseling, no questions asked. Parents have to encourage their children to go to counseling. And kids have to realize—they may not at first—that they really do want or need to change.

When all these conditions are met, I guarantee you that kids will make positive changes in their lives.

As counselors, it's our job to be there, sometimes when no one else is. It's our job to listen to the kids, to look out for them. And when we succeed—when the kids succeed—it's easy to remember why we chose this profession.

With glasses, medicine, a roof over his head, and some counseling, Nathan's passing half his classes. Now in a children-of-divorce group, Jeff's beginning to realize that his parents' problems aren't his fault—and his grades are going up.

With counseling, Susan's learning to express her feelings in words, Kevin understands he was right to turn his father in, and Melanie has a *B* average, soaring toward *A*s.

Stacey Wescott

NEA member Cynthia Kowa Basler is a guidance counselor at Reagan Middle School in Dixon, Illinois. Her work was recently featured in an article in the New York Times.

You Said It

Bill Fischer, editor

What a shock to wake up to find this headline as I sipped my morning coffee: ***97 Percent of Schools in Va. Fail New Exams.***

That was the front page headline in the *Washington Post* in early January.

Just 39 out of 1,800 schools, the story started out, had passed the state's new Standards of Learning tests in history, science, math, and English given to students in grades 3, 5, 8, and high school last spring.

I was looking for better news as I continued to read, but it only got worse. In my home area, Fairfax County, just 13 out of more than 200 schools had passed.

I went through the list school by school, just as many other parents must have done. Both of the local schools my two kids attend, I found, had "flunked."

This was hard to believe. Fairfax County is the nation's 12th largest school system and often wins praise for the quality of education it delivers. Words like "flunk" and "fail" seemed way out of place.

As badly as I felt, I knew that teachers throughout Virginia must have felt even worse. Newspapers statewide were trumpeting the news that all but a handful of schools were "failures."

Virginia schools, of course, are not failing, as I know from my kids' experience. There's much more to the Virginia education story than the newspaper headlines let on.

But the articles below those headlines only scratched the surface of that story, just noting in passing the dilemma of teachers, as one put it, "caught between teaching to the test and providing the varied learning experiences we know work."

This month's *NEA Today* cover story addresses many of the issues that this Virginia story raises. We look at both Virginia, where schools have just had their first encounter with state-mandated tests, and Texas, where such tests have been in place for several years.

High-stakes tests, it's clear, are an issue that's likely to be on center stage for a long time to come.

Bill Fischer

Meet

Gale Zucker

Howard Gardner

All Kinds of Smarts

All human beings have at least eight different intelligences," says Howard Gardner, co-director of the Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "And no two people have exactly the same profile of intelligences."

Buy that, Gardner says, and you come to a fork in the road.

"We can either ignore those differences and teach everybody the same stuff in the same way and assess everybody in the same way. Or we can say, 'Look, people learn in different kinds of ways, and they have different intellectual strengths and weaknesses. Let's take that into account in how we teach and how we assess.'"

Which will it be? NEA Today's *Stefanie Weiss spoke recently with Gardner, who introduced the theory of multiple intelligences in 1983.*

Can you define your theory?

Multiple intelligences is a psychological theory about the mind. It's a critique of the notion that there's a single intelligence that we're born with, which can't be changed, and which psychologists can measure. It's based on a lot of scientific research in fields ranging from psychology to anthropology to biology.

Most intelligence tests look at language or logic or both—those are just two of the intelligences. The other six are musical, spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist.

How can educators use your theory?

If you favor education for understanding—going deeply into topics so students can really make use of knowledge in new situations—the way I do, then multiple intelligences can be extremely helpful.

When you're teaching, you can approach a topic in many ways. You can provide analogies and metaphors for different domains. And you can present key ideas in a number of different languages or symbol systems.

But obviously you can't do that if you're going to spend five minutes on a topic and then move on to something else. Then you're almost constrained to present it one way, which is usually verbally, and to give people a short-answer test.

Can standardized tests ever hope to measure children's full intelligence?

I'm not in favor of tests that are designed to measure people's intelligence, because, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter if you have an IQ of 160 if you sit around and do nothing. What's important—whatever your IQ or profile of intelligences—is that you can demonstrate knowledge and understanding of things that matter.

So I think assessments ought to focus on the kinds of things we want people to understand, and they ought to give people a chance to perform their understandings.

Will high-stakes tests force people to abandon new approaches to teaching?

Yes. Current approaches almost inevitably push people to teach to the test. But let's be clear about this: Assessment is fine. Even standardized assessment is fine, if it looks at important things and allows us to probe in-depth what people understand.

But if it's just whether you memorized the encyclopedia and can spit it out, it's of no value. Six months later, you'll have forgotten everything.

How can tests probe for understanding?

Say you're teaching American history, you say to your students, "I want you to discuss the role of immigration in America, but you can discuss it with reference to any one of 20 different groups or 20 different issues."

If, on the other hand, you require people to know all 20 different groups and all 20 issues, then obviously they can't know very much about any one of them. It's just very superficial, *Jeopardy*-style knowledge.

Do you tell teachers how to teach using your theory?

Absolutely not. There's no single multiple intelligences approach. Basically, the idea is if you value the differences among students and take them seriously, that should have implications for how you present materials.

But whether you teach seven or eight courses, or you teach something seven or eight ways, or you teach to strength or you teach to weakness, those are all decisions you make. They don't follow from the theory.

I've got a set of ideas, and I'm most interested when people use those ideas in ways that make sense to them, not when somebody else tells them you've got to teach this in seven or eight different ways because Gardner said so.

Some say language and logic are the most important intelligences. You say all eight are equally important.

There's no question that if you have a certain combination of language and logic, you're going to be facile in handling the kinds of tests we usually give, and as long as you stay in school, you'll think you're smart. If you ever should walk out into the street, you might be in for a huge shock.

If you're not good in language and logic in school, you'll have a harder time because you'll think you're dumb. You'll have to get through school before you have a chance to show what you can accomplish in life.

So if you're not very good in language and logic, you've got three choices—one is to punt, the second is to try to improve your language and logic skills, and the third is to say, "I can learn about things in other ways. Let's see whether I can use those other ways to do a better job."

Got an example?

I'm very bad with maps, but there are lots of other ways to find your way around, and it's often very good to use the intelligences that are there.

If anybody doesn't believe in multiple intelligences, they should go on an automobile ride with three other people and get totally lost and see how each person tries to get back home. That will make them an instant convert to the theory of multiple intelligences. People do not think the same way.

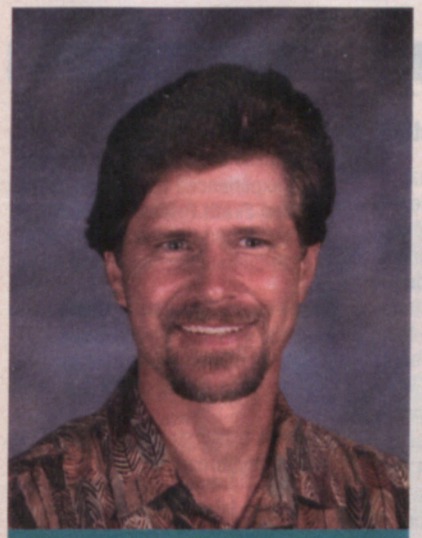
Resources

Howard Gardner has two new books coming out this year:

- *The Disciplined Mind: What All Students Should Understand.* Simon and Schuster, May 1999, $24, 288 pp., www.simonsays.com.
- *Multiple Intelligences Reframed.* Basic Books, Fall 1999, www.basicbooks.com.
- To read more of Gardner's remarks, go to www.nea.org/today.

Debate

Should student test scores be used to evaluate teachers?



Yes

A teacher on special assignment, Eric Anderson is dean of students at Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School in Oceanside, California. In his post, he handles student discipline problems and supervises student teachers. Anderson has served as vice president of the Oceanside Teachers Association.

Given the atmosphere of teacher and public education bashing that's sweeping the nation, we must improve the teacher evaluation process. One way to do that would be to link teacher evaluations to student test scores.

The purpose of teaching is to educate, and we should be held accountable for how well we do it. The public wants accountability from their public schools. I say we give it to them.

Current teacher evaluation measures aren't working and surely aren't providing accountability. We've all heard the horror stories about poor teachers who get positive evaluations because the principal never sets foot in the classroom to see what's really going on.

Some principals don't have the will to evaluate teachers poorly. Some principals don't have time to evaluate teachers properly. And most principals' evaluations based on one or two visits are subjective, consisting of little more than an administrator's feelings about a teacher.

Tying student test scores to teacher evaluations could help principals evaluate—or, as Webster says, "determine the value of"—teachers by creating objective measures that could level the playing field for all teachers.

That said, evaluating teachers using student test scores should be done with these safeguards in mind.

■ Student test scores should be only one aspect of a teacher's evaluation, not the be-all and end-all of it.

■ It's imperative that the tests that are used measure student achievement accurately. To make sure they do, teachers need to be active in the development of testing instruments.

■ Educators must be given the time and training to appropriately align curriculum to the tests. We must make sure we're teaching the material we want our students to learn.

■ Tests should measure how much students progress. Students come to us with a wide range of skill levels, so it's ludicrous to evaluate us poorly if every student doesn't score at a certain level before exiting our classrooms.

But it's my belief that every student should show a measure of growth. That measure of growth is what should be linked to our evaluations.

To measure progress, each student should take a before and after test. Evaluators should look to see if student scores, on average, increase. If they don't, teachers and administrators need to take a collaborative look at what went wrong.

■ Teachers should be evaluated on the scores of students who have been with them for the full length of the class. Imagine being evaluated on the scores of students who have only been in your class for a month or who have been absent half the year.

Linking teacher evaluations and student test scores isn't going to solve all our problems with ineffective teachers. But it can be a good start in getting them help or getting them out of the classroom.

With the safeguards outlined above, determining teacher effectiveness by using student test scores can be an attainable and constructive goal.

I can't imagine any teacher having a problem with being evaluated based on performance. And if our students aren't succeeding, we aren't succeeding either.

No

Patsy Robertson, a library media specialist, serves the Greece (New York) Teachers Association as vice-president for educational programs. She's also a member of NEA-New York's Board of Directors and vice-chair of the Rochester Environmental Commission. E-mail: proberts@greeceny.com.

In the fervor to impose higher standards, states have decreed that students shall pass tougher tests.

Now I applaud higher standards. I even think that we, as educators, sometimes don't expect enough from our students. But evaluating teachers based on student test scores won't boost accountability.

Instead, teacher evaluation by student test scores will:

■ *Promote teaching to the test.* All lessons that don't teach something measured by the test will likely be dropped.

That means that many of us will be forced to abandon units that we know are valuable. After all, high-stakes tests can't measure love of the written or spoken word, the inner warmth created by a trombone solo, the joy of riding a seesaw, the pride of playing together on a team.

High-stakes tests can't measure a teacher's ability to create lifelong learners, productive citizens, and people who can work together to solve the world's problems.

■ *Put an unreasonable amount of trust in an untested test.* Most statewide tests raise far more questions than they can possible answer.

Are policy makers sure the tests measure what should be taught? Has the curriculum been appropriately aligned with the newest standards?

Are the tests valid and reliable, as we were taught in our college Tests and Measurements courses? Are they free of gender and cultural bias? Are adequate materials and equipment provided in sufficient quantities?

Without answers, we can't possibly tie teacher evaluations to test scores.

■ *Place an unreasonable burden on teachers—and teachers alone—to get students ready to learn.* But what can teachers do about the first grader who fixes his own breakfast but finds no milk or cereal today?

And what about the fifth grader who's being abused by her uncle, the seventh grader who got drunk last night, or the senior who owns no coat but leaves home at 5:30 in the morning to wait in the cold to catch two buses to get to school?

Given today's average class sizes, teachers don't have time to solve home-based problems. It's almost impossible to find time to help a student who needs a lesson presented in a different way, let alone listen to a student excited about her new dream of becoming an astronaut.

It's not fair to hold teachers "accountable" when so much of what influences a youngster's learning occurs outside of a teacher's control. Rather than blame teachers, our challenge is to get all parents, educators, employers, and legislators working together so all of our children can learn and achieve.

■ *Create an unhealthy competition among teachers at just the wrong time.* In recent years, some of us have finally succeeded in breaking down classroom isolation. The professional dialogue and work with colleagues that's taken place as a result is cause for rejoicing. Now is not the time to nip it in the bud.

■ *Finally, tying student test scores to teacher evaluations warps the purpose of testing in the first place.* Test scores should be used to help teachers improve student learning—and nothing more.

What's Your Opinion?

Should student test scores be used to evaulate teachers?

To vote, visit our Web site at **www.nea.org/neatoday** and see the results instantly.

Should PTAs be allowed to fund school staff positions?

The tally on this Debate question from the last issue of *NEA Today:*

27% Yes **73% No**

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Employment

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California Jobs. All districts and county offices. Over 1,000 listings for $14.95. EduSource, Box 6546, Fullerton, CA 92834.

Teach English abroad. Crdts/Certs. School of TESL. 206/781-8607. www.seattleu.edu/soe/stesl/

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For more information on CHIP efforts in your state and eligibility, E-mail kidhealth@aol.com or write the NEA Health Information Network at 1201 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036.

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Media Evaluators

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KIDS FIRST! is an initiative of the not-for-profit Coalition for Quality Children's Media which evaluates children's videotapes, CD-ROMs and television programming designed for ages infant to 18. KIDS FIRST! evaluates and rates children's media using a highly acclaimed method that has been praised by parents and educators alike. It utilizes professionally designed criteria and evaluation tools and engages a nationwide volunteer jury comprising child development professionals, teachers, parents and children of diverse geographic, socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.

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The Education Technology Promotion Guide from the Software Publishers Association offers guidelines for publishing the success of your educational technology program. A CD-ROM includes letter and press release templates in both MAC and PC formats. To obtain a copy for your local Association, E-mail your name, address and the name of your local to **Sheistar@aol.com**

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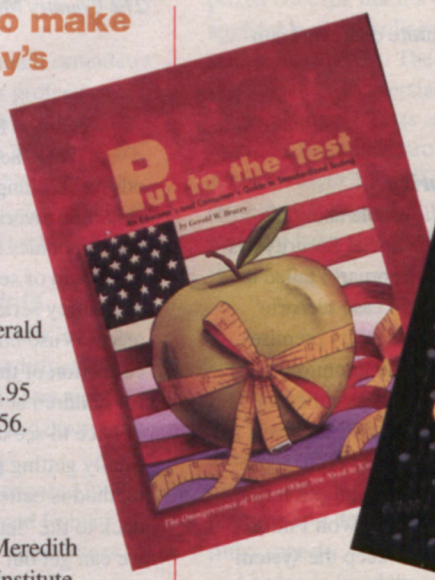
Books

Asking the Right Questions

Who's going to make sense of today's test scores—you or the media?



Put to the Test
An Educator's and Consumer's Guide to Standardized Testing. Gerald Bracey. Phi Delta Kappa International, 74 pp., $14.95 plus $3 s&h, 800/766-1156.

The Black-White Test Score Gap
Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, eds. Brookings Institute Press, 380 pp., $18.95.

Why have tests become so important?" asks researcher Gerald Bracey in his latest book, *Put to the Test*. "The short answer is that people lost confidence in their schools and the people who run them."

Lacking that trust, Bracey writes, people clamor for the accountability—and alleged objectivity—of standardized tests scores. But test scores beg interpretation, a subjective task often left to politicians and reporters, who rarely shed light or inspire confidence.

Two new books may change that by offering help to educators and parents who want to understand for themselves.

Bracey's "educator's and consumer's guide" provides context for today's testing craze, sets out some key principles for quality testing, then answers tons of technical questions.

Questions like: Can tests measure potential or aptitude? What does it mean to be below grade level? And why all the fuss about SAT scores?

For answers to perhaps the toughest question standardized tests raise—Why do so many Black and Hispanic children fare worse on these tests than their white and Asian counterparts?—turn to *The Black-White Test Score Gap*.

Editors Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips have done a phenomenal job of collecting all the current, credible research on this topic in one illuminating—and troubling—volume.

They start with a key fact: "No one has found genetic evidence indicating that Blacks have less innate intellectual ability than whites." Then, in a 50-page introduction that doubles as summary, they explain the stakes: "If racial equality is America's goal, reducing the Black-white test score gap would probably do more to promote this goal than any other strategy that commands broad political support."

From there, the editors review the data, punching holes in much of the conventional wisdom. A few highlights:

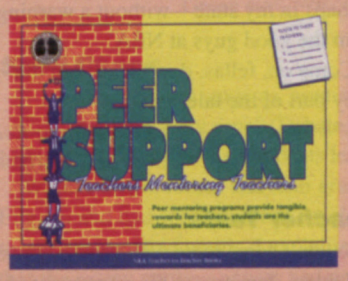
- Tests are biased, not because of what they ask but because of what they don't ask.
- Differences in parental education and income don't explain everything. Wealthy Black children score lower than wealthy white children.
- But half the Black-white gap in 12th grade test scores can be explained by differences in first grade scores.
- "By basing their expectations on children's past performance and behavior," explains Harvard professor Ronald Ferguson, "teachers perpetuate racial disparities in achievement."

What politically viable methods will close the gap? Jencks and Phillips report consensus on "reducing class size, requiring greater academic competence among teachers, and raising teachers' expectations for students who have trouble with schoolwork."

In education, policy rarely reflects credible research. This book argues for a change in practice. Buy a copy for yourself—and one for your school board.

—Stefanie Weiss

New from the NEA Professional Library



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Whether you're already participating in a peer mentoring program, getting ready to start one in your district, or just interested in exploring the topic, you'll find *Peer Support* an informative and valuable resource.

For more information or to order, call 800/229-4200.

EXCERPT

"How do you expect me to do all of this at once?" Kate's exasperation erupted at the end of the lengthy faculty meeting. Kate fled to her empty classroom at lunch time to cope with her anxiety in private. She was still grumbling as I entered the room.

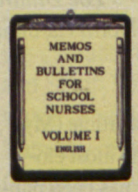
"I heard your frustration as you left the meeting, and I came to help. Just think of me as the Welcome Wagon for Forest Edge Elementary. What do you want to start with first?" That's how it began. Our partnership in mentoring was the beginning of a valuable friendship.

Books by NEA Members

Story Book
Cherubic Children's New Classic Story Book, Vol. 2. Juliette Gray, editor. Cherubic Press, 378 pp., $24.95 plus $5 s&h to P.O. Box 5306, Johnstown, PA 15904. A collection of 33 stories to help young children learn life lessons. Alvin Robert Cunningham's story, *My Brother has a Brain Injury,* uses a painful personal lesson to teach kids about the importance of bike helmets.

PowerSpeaking® For Kids K-6+
Pauline Binkley. *PMLP Company, 80 pp., $35 for large book with 5 posters, $8 each for workbooks, 800/642-8348.* This manual for teachers includes step-by-step lessons for teaching young children the fundamentals of public speaking.

Be Mine
Jane McFann. *Scholastic, Inc. 245 pp., $3.25 plus $2 s&h to P.O. Box 7502, 2932 E. McCarty St., Jefferson City, MO 65102. Or check www.amazon.com.* In this young adult thriller, somebody may love Bethany to death—literally.



Memos and Bulletins for School Nurses
Sandra Barlau. *15 pp., $5 includes s&h to South Bay Union School District, Pupil Personnel, 601 Elm Ave., Imperial Beach, CA 91932.* This booklet, in both English and Spanish, provides informational text school nurses can submit to parent or staff newsletters. Formatted to fit the academic year.

Nicotine Management
Alice Morin. *Los Abuelos Press., 66 pp., $5.95 plus $2 s&h to P.O. Box 9301, Palm Springs, CA 92263.* A great little gift for those whose sense of humor has not yet gone up in smoke, this tiny book lists the many benefits of smoking "air cigarettes."

Letters

The Trade-offs

After putting untold hours and thousands of dollars into getting my master's degree, I'm less than enthusiastic about national certification (Cover story, February). It's extremely unfair that graduate degrees aren't honored with the same professional bells and whistles as National Board certification now earns.

Pay increases for master's degrees in North Carolina are nowhere near as high as they are for national certification. No one encouraged me, except family and friends, to get a master's. And I didn't get offers to pay for my graduate work from the state or county, either.

Even if I wanted to get certified, national certification in the arts is slow in coming. I have yet to hear of theater arts even being included at all. I'd really appreciate a little more arts advocacy from NEA and its affiliates.

Zoe Dillard
Guilford County, North Carolina

'Stifle the Mantra'

Ramnath Subramanian's article (My Turn, February) was the most eloquent and direct article that has been published in *NEA Today* for many years. It wasn't saturated with politics or politically correct dialogue. It was the essence of teaching.

We don't need color printers, new computer labs, countless unproven teaching techniques, and special self-esteem programs. We need students who have a soul and teachers who are passionate about what they do.

Haven't we all bought into the craziest teaching styles and programs at the expense of what we know works?

Jeffrey Grills
Boonsboro, Maryland

Finally, a voice for stability in the classroom! Ramnath Subramanian's article echoes my reasons for retiring.

We're letting the information explosion in educational pedagogy and a lack of a "clear idea of positioning and purpose" steer us into trouble. It's even getting harder for "no bells and whistles" ideas to find public voice in today's world.

Thanks to Subramanian for trying to stem the tide by speaking out. And thanks to *NEA Today* for printing it.

Susan Wakefield
Coralville, Iowa

Reading All Year

Of course, library media specialists will get behind Read Across America. We'll be excited to see people supporting reading on any occasion.

Still, it's unfortunate that *NEA Today* has ignored many annual literacy efforts in recent articles about reading (Newsmakers, January and February).

The American Association of School Librarians sponsors School Library Media Month each April. The International Reading Association sponsors Children's Book Week in November. And there are others of long standing.

Let's all join in Read Across America, but let's not forget that many other times of the year are good for promoting reading, too.

When every school has appropriate and abundant reading materials, an open and inviting library, and professionals who know the places books will take you, then we'll have reading students.

Erlene Bishop Killeen
Stoughton, Wisconsin

What Works Best?

Your question: What do you do when a parent insists on a specific strategy or method?" (Families & Communities, February) was a good one.

Too many parents feel that they know how best to educate children, and yet have never been in a classroom.

A number of years ago, a parent told me, "Anyone can do what you do." I asked when she wanted to teach, and she came in a week later. She lasted until noon, then said there wasn't enough money in the world to get her back in the afternoon.

I never had a more dedicated supporter after that.

Dan Zorn
Mendota, Illinois

Social Security

Your optimistic article about the strength of the Social Security system (Newsmakers, February) failed to mention that the "best case scenario" relies on what may be faulty premises.

First, the "don't pay attention to the bleak forecasts" crowd assumes the U.S. economy will grow at current levels for the next several decades. Yeah, right.

Second, there's an assumption that taxpayers under 40 now won't mind paying huge taxes to keep the system solvent when baby boomers retire.

Let's face the simple demographic facts: There haven't been enough births during the '60s, '70s, and '80s to provide an adequate labor supply to pay the freight for retiring boomers.

In sum, you might not want to bank (no pun intended) on Social Security keeping you at a high standard of living.

Michael Cross
Springfield, Oregon

Editor's note: For a true understanding of all the Social Security facts, both simple and complex, the Social Security Superpage on the Internet is a good place to start. Check www.ourfuture.org/institute/sss.asp.

Teaching Reading

What's the rush for reading on the kindergarten and first grade level (Cover story, January)? What happened to socialization skills, circle time, show and tell, the sandbox, and the science table where curious minds and tiny fingers can feel scratchy birds' nests?

At five years old, kids should read for fun, then finger paint, play with puppets, enjoy music, and *listen* to great stories like *The Country Mouse and the City Mouse.*

Phyllis Suchman
Paterson, New Jersey

McGuffey Readers, written in the late 1800s, acknowledged several methods for teaching reading, including two perennial favorites—popular then and now—phonics and word recognition.

Instead of setting the two at odds, the McGuffey series recommended that teachers use both. Each book was a collection of the best literature available for children at that time.

Nice to see that a century later we're finally getting past the rancor of "my method is better than your method" and back to the "let's use every good method we can get our hands on."

Janet Kragen
Bainbridge Island, Washington

Required Reading

Thanks to Paul Tiernan, the Massachusetts teacher who introduced a bill requiring all elected state officials to take a Public Leadership Competency Test (Heroes & Zeroes, January).

In my state, I recommend that all elected officials be required to pass Florida's F-CAT, the test that will soon be required for high school graduation. Why ask our children to do things some of us are unwilling or unable to do?

Nancy J. Smith
Panama City, Florida

Dish the Dirt

Right on for your article about the classified employees in Oroville, Washington, who won big (Newsmakers, January). We need to hear about heroes.

But we need to hear about the villains, too. Why was the name of the sneaky superintendent omitted? He left to practice his nefarious deeds elsewhere—perhaps in my state—without a warning from the good guys at NEA.

Come on, fellas, don't leave out the juicy part of the tale.

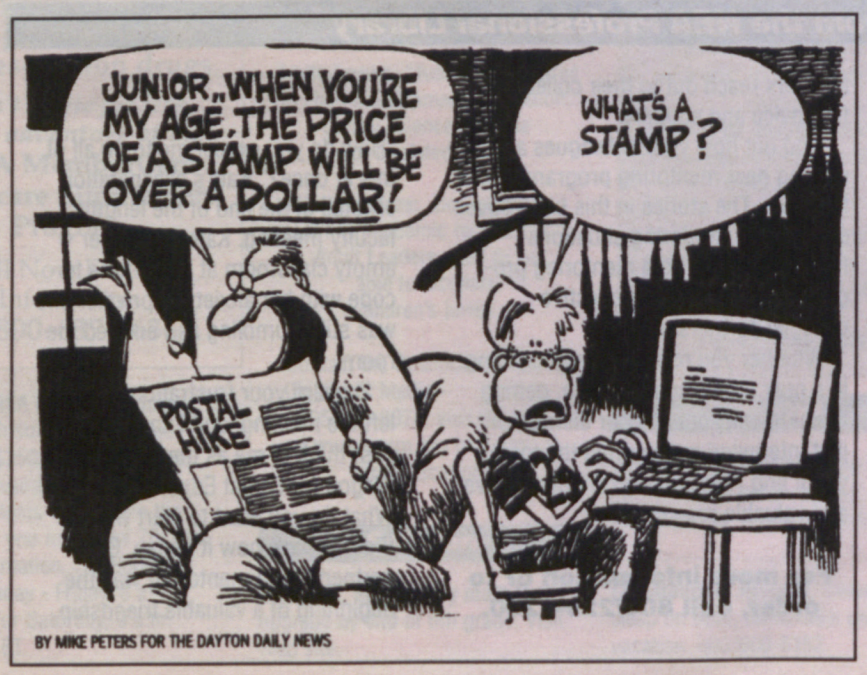
Elaine Alfano-Rees
Cave Creek, Arizona

Teacher Tests

I couldn't agree more with Clarke Fowler (Letters, January) in his assessment of the Massachusetts teacher exam. California has the same problem—a CBEST exam for teachers that doesn't measure what it says it does.

My wife is unable to find work even though she has earned good grades in her teacher preparation courses. The CBEST exam is the roadblock.

I've been teaching for 35 years, and I don't think I could pass the test either,


JUNIOR, WHEN YOU'RE MY AGE, THE PRICE OF A STAMP WILL BE OVER A DOLLAR!
WHAT'S A STAMP?
POSTAL HIKE
BY MIKE PETERS FOR THE DAYTON DAILY NEWS

even though I hold multiple graduate degrees. A former Teacher of the Year in California took the test 14 times before she finally passed it. If she had given up trying, the state would have lost a highly dedicated individual.

How many more top-notch candidates are turned away from our profession because of the poor quality of state exams? There has to be a better way to check for literacy than what exists now.

Gerald Lunderville
Long Beach, California

Searching for Morals

I was appalled to see your article on the number of public school districts that protect gay and lesbian teachers and students from harassment and discrimination (Innovators, January).

I don't want my child exposed to curriculum that lists gay and lesbian accomplishments. I have reservations about addressing homosexuality in my classroom. And I don't want to be trained to teach such a curriculum.

I would never intentionally mistreat any person—homosexual or heterosexual—and I wouldn't allow a student in my class to mistreat another student. But let's teach what's morally correct.

Donna Martin
Westville, Florida

Where's the Compassion?

The article about and photograph of a teacher who wrestles steers (People, November) was disheartening.

Publishing it shows you have no compassion for animals, who were not put on this earth to be grabbed and yanked ruthlessly to the ground.

It makes me sick to think that a large man falls on or near a poor, defenseless steer, just to jerk the animal to the ground. For what?

I hope our magazine will do more to promote kindness to all living beings in the future.

S. Bauknecht
Green Bay, Wisconsin

Spell Check

Should we correct students' grammar all the time, every time? (Debate, November). How else will students learn?

When I taught fourth and fifth grade English and had students write articles, I marked misspelled words. I explained that the marks on their papers had nothing to do with their story. The marks were there to help them learn English.

I gave a grade for the story, one for sentences and punctuation, one for penmanship, and one for spelling. I think a written assignment should help students learn all four things—and help prepare them for the future.

Julia King
Riverdale, Michigan

Academic Freedom

I was quite disturbed by "Academic Freedom Takes a Hit" (Rights Watch, November). Academic freedom is a prized concept, but it's really most applicable at the college level, when students are adults. Then they need to be exposed to controversial subjects and encouraged to discuss and debate them.

Public school classrooms aren't *The Jerry Springer Show*. To teachers who think they have to deal with his kinds of topics to keep students' interest, I say, shame on you.

John Izatt
Clearfield, Utah

For years, NEA's focus has been on "rights"—too often, the right to tear down standards and get children to march to the school board carrying placards and demanding protection for filthy speech.

Academic freedom must carry with it some responsibility. A large part of our commitment to youth surely needs to include a commitment to the better and higher standards of the community.

Someday, we're going to have to recognize that those who abuse their freedoms are destined to lose them.

L.A. Wheeler
San Leandro, California

Author, Author

Thanks for being such a great resource (Heads Up, April). Thanks to *NEA Today*, I discovered that the *Christian Science Monitor* accepts articles from teachers. I contacted them via E-mail, and my article was finally accepted.

I was glad to share my district's approach to teaching the Holocaust across and throughout the curriculum.

You can read my article, which ran on January 26, on the *Monitor*'s Web site. Or submit your own story by calling Amelia Newcomb at 800/288-7090, ext. 2440, or sending E-mail to newcomba@csps.com.

Greg Smith
Beaver Dam, Wisconsin

Let's Talk

Share your ideas, comments, and opinions with *NEA Today* in one of five ways:

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Letters are edited for length and clarity.

A Letter from: South Korea

Teaching's Danger Zone

By Quinten Russo

I didn't take the move from Pittsburgh to Pusan, South Korea, lightly. I prepared for every contingency—or so I thought.

Like all Americans planning to teach on a military base overseas, I went through a thorough background check, got all my immunizations, and completed what seemed like thousands of forms.

I raided the pharmacy for a year's worth of supplies I was afraid to be without. I mailed my iron over in advance, since the rest of my household goods and car wouldn't get to Korea until two months after I did. I even mailed my favorite bulletin boards to start off the school year.

No, it wasn't until I was living on the military base in Pusan, a seaside town at the southeastern tip of the Korean peninsula, that I realized I had forgotten to think seriously about one thing.

My safety.

While the United States media fixated on Monica Lewinsky's cocktail dress, North Korea shot practice missiles into the Sea of Japan. Our base—and all the other American military bases in Korea—went on high-security alert.

How much danger were we in? I'd made several friends who were military, so I thought that I could get the inside scoop. But no matter what questions I asked, I got the same answer: "I can't say."

Those three words made me wonder whether I'd hugged my mother and father hard enough at the airport. All kinds of things went through my mind.

At the same time—by coincidence, I'm sure—new employees were asked to fill out a "Neo-Packet," a quick and comprehensive reference in the event of an emergency evacuation.

Neo-Packets include vital statistics, medical needs, an inventory of household goods, and our very own toe tag, just in case we fly home in cargo, not business class.

Still, I maintained a positive outlook and got my classroom all set for the start of school. Eventually, the situation cooled down.

As tensions subsided, perspective returned. Colleagues talked about hiding their children under beds during a Central American conflict, living through volcanic eruptions in the Philippines, and spending 10 hours being interrogated because of a missing work visa. By comparison, our alert didn't seem like such a big deal.

After all, the military had done a wonderful job keeping us informed and building trust. In fact, I've never been prouder to be an American, supporting our military by teaching American children, some of whom have yet to see our shores.

Truth be told, as educators, we take risks wherever we choose to teach. Whether we're in inner-city schools coping with gangs, rural areas missing facilities and funding, or halfway around the globe fearing missiles and monsoons, there are always risks involved and choices to make.

Sure, there are risks here, but I love working with children and adults from all over the world. And that unfamiliar jingle of foreign coins in my pocket gives me just as much of a thrill as it did the very first time I heard it.

I'm even discovering the thrilling side of danger. I joined a group of teachers recently in a weekend visit to the de-militarized zone between North and South Korea. We had to sign waivers that release the U.S. military from any responsibility in case of death or injury. The guides carry guns.

The tour includes entrance into the Military Armistice Commission Room, a neutral negotiation area where North Korean guards frequently come and peer into the windows at the tourists. All visitors are instructed not to converse, point, or make gestures at them.

That day, there were about 15 guards in their olive-drab uniforms looking in on the tourists—and I was thrilled to be among them!

Quinten Russo taught school in the Pittsburgh suburbs for 10 years. He's now a member of the Federal Education Association, an NEA affiliate that represents educators at Department of Defense Education Activity Schools worldwide. You can write to Russo at qtrusso@yahoo.com.

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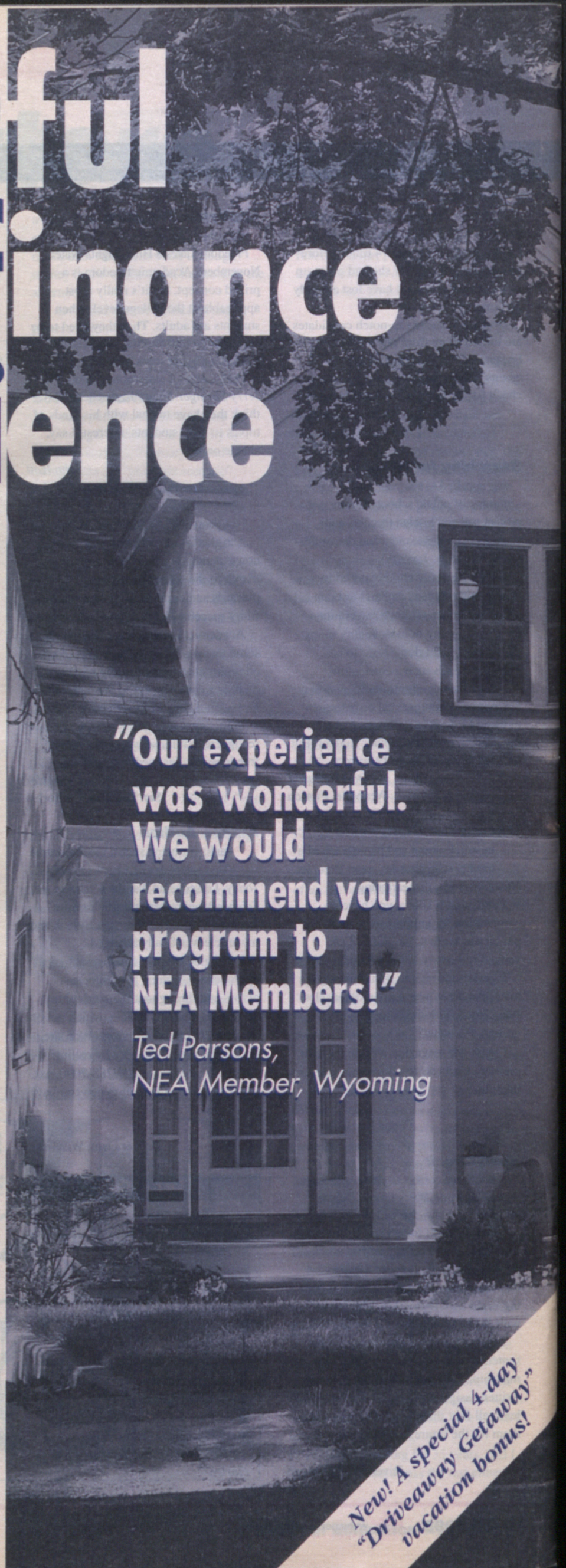
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